

HERBERT LACY.

BY

1343
3793

THE AUTHOR OF GRANBY.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

By Thomas Henry Lister

La morale est la science des sciences à ne la considérer que sous le rapport du calcul; et il y a toujours des limites à l'esprit de ceux qui n'ont pas senti l'harmonie de la nature des choses avec les devoirs de l'homme.

MADAME DE STAEL.

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THE HISTORY OF GREAT BRITAIN

BY THE REV. JOHN GAY

IN THREE VOLUMES. THE SECOND VOLUME.
LONDON: Printed by J. KNEELAND, at the
Sign of the Sun in Pall-mall; and by J. DODD, in
St. Dunstons Church-yard. 1741.

VOL. II.



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TO
THOMAS LISTER, ESQ.
OF
ARMITAGE PARK,
Staffordshire.

To no one can I dedicate the following work with more propriety than to yourself, and to none certainly with greater pleasure. Whatever may be my attachment to literary pursuits, I consider myself as owing it entirely to the kindness and assiduity with which, from my earliest years, you have directed my attention to the cultivation of elegant letters. If I have fallen short of attaining the excellence which your parental partiality might lead you to hope, I must attribute my deficiency to any cause, rather than to the want of your encouragement and assistance. It is an additional source of satisfaction to me in making to you the offering of this little work, that it will afford

some exemplification of filial duties, and convey my own sense, however imperfectly, of the devotedness and respect which are due to the parental character. By no one ought this sentiment to be more sincerely and deeply felt than by myself: convinced as I am, that to those ties of perfect confidence, friendship, and esteem, which your kindness has established between us, I owe the principal happiness of my life. With the truest gratitude and respect, believe me,

Your very affectionate Son,

THE AUTHOR.

HERBERT LACY.

CHAPTER I.

I see, lady, the gentleman is not in your books.

No; an he were, I would burn my study.

Much Ado about Nothing.

“PRAY, Lady Appleby, did not you say that Mr. Lacy was coming here to-day?”

This important question was put to her ladyship one morning about the latter end of July, in the drawing-room at Huntley Park (of which Lord Appleby was the noble owner,) in the presence of a small party, consisting of the lady of Viscount Malvern, son of the Earl of Rodborough, Agnes Morton, her sister, and two Miss Tyrwhitts, daughters of Lord and Lady Appleby.

The querist was Mrs. Poole, an elderly widow of comfortable fortune, brisk, loquacious, and inquisitive; fond of communicating information, and eager in collecting it; a skilful match-maker, an unrivalled genealogist, and, alas! a frequent cause of mischief, though not often a wilful one. She was a good-humoured woman, who had lived much in the world, who was never dull but when alone, and whose society was greatly sought. Mrs. Poole

knew every body, and every body knew Mrs. Poole. She became a widow at an early age, had no children, and few concerns of her own to attend to, and therefore very naturally took a considerable interest in those of other people.

“Pray, Lady Appleby,” said the above-mentioned lady, “did not you say that Mr. Lacy was coming here to-day?”

“I dare say I did,” replied Lady Appleby, a tedious, speechifying woman; “for we *do* expect him; and I hope,” she added, with a gracious bend, as if she were addressing the absent person, “to have the pleasure of detaining him some time.”

“Does he come alone?”

“I trust not; for I expect to see him accompanied by his amusing brother-in-law, Mr. Hartley.”

“Do tell me something about the Lacys,” said Mrs. Poole, turning to Lady Malvern; “I have not seen them this age. Of course you know them very well; they are such near neighbours of your father.”

“Lord Rodborough is not such a very near neighbour,” replied Lady Malvern, rather drily.

“Lord! my dear, I did not mean your father-in-law; I was thinking of your own father’s place at Dodswell, which cannot, I should suppose, be more than six miles from Lacy Park; and that is what I call a pleasant, easy visiting distance. Do you see much of them?”

“We never saw any of them before I married—I suppose it is much the same now—is it not Agnes?”

“Precisely,” said Miss Morton.

“But how odd that is!” pursued Mrs. Poole; “and do you never meet them any where?”

“No, never.”

“And what is the reason?”

“I don’t know,” replied Miss Morton. “But I believe the fault lies chiefly in themselves. My father says that Sir William Lacy thinks none of his neighbours worth visiting. I have heard some people attribute it less to pride than to indolence: I have no right to give any opinion myself.”

“Oh, as to pride,” said Lady Malvern, “I don’t know what should make them proud, unless it is always staying at home, and seeing nobody better than themselves. I am sure nobody pays them much attention; and they are never seen in the world, and don’t come to town, and Lord Rodborough does not visit *him*; and as for *her*, I remember Lady Rodborough saying to me one day last winter, ‘Louisa,’ ‘who *was* Lady Lacy?’ and I remember I could not tell her: and, by the by, who are they, Mrs. Poole?”

“She was a Bellingham of the Upperville family; and as for the Lacys, they, you know, are as old as the flood, and very well connected too. Sir William Lacy’s mother was Lady Mary Loftus, aunt of the mad Lord Loftus, whose wife ran away with Sir Clement Packworth, the brother of the man who shot Lord Cheadle, husband of the naughty Lady Cheadle, whose brother was that Colonel Blake, who won so much from poor George Templeton, who had just entered his regiment, and whose sister made that unhappy low connexion which we were lamenting the other day. Sir William Lacy, when I knew him first, was a very promising young man; but I hear of late that he has grown quite a mope; I hope the son will not take after him.”

“I hope not,” said Lady Malvern, in a tone that contradicted the assertion; “but I *must* say

I think he will, if I may judge from what I have seen of him."

"Perhaps you have seen a good deal."

"Oh, no, dear! no; I pretend to know very little of him, or he of me, I dare say. We just speak—scarcely that. I remember this very spring at Almack's, I was standing talking to Lady Rodborough, and he came by; and he spoke *en passant* to Lady Rodborough, and then he stared at me as if he hardly knew whether to bow or not; and I acknowledged him—and then he bent in a sort of way as if he thought he did me a favour, which I thought rather ridiculous."

"I am sure," said Lady Appleby, who always apologized for those who wanted it, though with more benevolence than judgment—"I am sure he could not have known it was you."

"I believe his eyes are tolerably good. No, Lady Appleby, depend upon it, it was mere bad manner. I know many people who don't like him."

"Mr. Sackville likes him," observed Agnes Morton.

"People generally like those," said Lady Malvern, "who are under obligations to them."

"Obligations! how? do tell me;" said Miss Tyrwhitt to Agnes Morton. "What does he owe to Mr. Sackville?"

"Only his life," replied Agnes, with a smile. "They were in Italy together—Mr. Lacy was near being drowned in the Lago Maggiore, and Mr. Sackville fortunately saved him."

"He is a fine young man," said Mrs. Poole.

"Who? Mr. Sackville?"

"No, my dear, I should not speak of him as a young man, though, to be sure, he is not much

more than thirty. I was speaking of Mr. Lacy, who is a young man, and a fine young man too."

"Perhaps he may be," said Miss Morton; "but I feel very much disposed to dislike him."

"Why so?"

"Oh—why—because it is my duty—is it not, sister? You must know we hoist the black flag at Dodswell, and give no quarter to a Lacy."

"I suppose," said Mrs. Poole, "you will allow him to be good-looking."

"I won't allow him to be good for any thing, if I can help it," replied Miss Morton; "but, perhaps, Mrs. Poole, you are not aware that my dislike proceeds from true meritorious party-spirit. To tell you the truth, I have never seen this gentleman whom I am so ready to abuse."

"I should have been more surprised at your disliking him, if you had seen him;" replied Mrs. Poole.

"It is a pity," resumed Miss Morton, laughing, "to waste such compliments upon absent persons. Do say something flattering to us. I long to engage you to be *my* trumpeter."

"Thank you, my dear; but I had rather not, unless I could keep the office to myself, and prevent others from praising you too; and that would be impossible."

"My dear Mrs. Poole, you overflow with civil sayings. You are like the fairy-tale girl that talked pearls and diamonds. I cannot bear this fire myself—I must turn it off upon Mr. Lacy. How long have you known him?"

"Ever since May. I saw him one morning at Lady Ashborne's, talked about him after he was gone, and was told he was clever and pleasant, and so forth; and it happened just then that I was looking about for some new young men to put on my

list, for I always like to know a good many; and several lately had married off, and he was just the person I wanted; so I said, 'Lady Ashborne, do send him to me, and tell him I used to know his father, and I must have him go next week to my friend Mrs. Chatterley's little party!' Somehow or other he never came. However, about a week afterwards, one night, I forget where Lady Ashborne brought him up to me. I asked him to a party, and saw him afterwards several times both at my own house and elsewhere."

"And what was his style of conversation?"

"Merely the style of all the world—he was lively, and pleasant and full of chit-chat, and knew what was going on, and told one all the accidents, and gambling, and elopements, and marriages that were to be, or were not to be."

"Scandal, in short," interrupted Lady Malvern.

"Why, to be sure, some people might call it scandal—though, I don't remember that he ever spoke particularly ill of any one."

"Oh, but he must;" pursued Lady Malvern—"you are only too good-natured, Mrs. Poole, and won't remember any thing unpleasant."

"Well—I don't know—I hope I am—all I can say, is, that I found him agreeable."

"Indeed," said Lady Appleby, "he is very agreeable, and as for scandal I can satisfy you on that point: he never told me an anecdote in his life, and always expressed himself upon every occasion in the most obliging manner possible."

Now really, my dear Lady Appleby," said Lady Malvern, with a provoking smile, "you are a very cruel person: that was the unkindest cut of all. 'Expresses himself on every occasion in the most obliging manner possible!' Quite intolerable, I assure you. There is nothing more disagreeable

than to meet with people who never contradict you: it is the worst compliment they could pay: it seems as if they abstained from opposing one out of pure compassion for the weakness of one's understanding. I cannot describe what I have suffered from those good creatures that are always of one's own opinion."

"I don't think," observed Mrs. Poole, "that you will find young Lacy that sort of person. I should say, he was rather, satirically inclined. Some declare, he wrote those lines about three of the Almack's Patronesses, whose titles begin with the same letter. 'Three ladies in three distant counties born'—I won't go on—for it is too severe; but I hardly believe it is his, for I know he positively denies it. He is decidedly guilty of the prologue to the Private Theatricals at Norton; and you may see some other things of his when you next meet Lady Barbara Tempest."

"Thank you, Mrs. Poole," said Lady Malvern; "I am sadly in want of a bribe to make me wish to meet Lady Barbara; but I am afraid Mr Lacy's lines are hardly sufficient. Heaven defend me from going again to that dreadfully clever woman's town parties! The room smelt of new publications, and one meets dingy foreign *savans*, and people that try to look as if they were prodigious thinkers, and talk, by way of light conversation, about 'a superior article in the last Review.' And so this Mr. Lacy is an ally of Lady Barbara? Very well—that is quite enough.—If he is literary, I give him up—I do abhor a wise young man."

"Oh, I assure you," exclaimed Miss Tyrwhitt, "he is not a wise young man, indeed."

"Then pray," said Agnes, "prove him a foolish one as quickly as you can, and put the poor creature out of his misery."

"No, but he is not foolish either. I only mean, he does not talk gravely, and learnedly, and use long words, and that sort of thing; but talks—just all about any thing in the world."

"Nonsense, in short."

"Well—yes—perhaps it is."

"That is conclusive," said Lady Malvern.

"I can tell you more," resumed Mrs. Poole, "which some may think to his advantage. He is said to be only too agreeable, and likes to turn young ladies' heads, and then turns away his own, and will have no more to say to them. He is not to be fixed—in fact, a dangler—that is what I have heard of him."

"Dear! that is odd," said Lady Appleby. "It was only the other day I was told that he was engaged to be married to Miss Hartley, his brother-in-law's sister—was not it so, Augusta? You must have heard as well as I."

Miss Tyrwhitt did not seem to have a very clear recollection, but said, she believed she did hear something about his being either engaged or going to be.

"To be what?" said Mrs Poole.

"Engaged!"

"Oh, *going to be* engaged—A very critical situation! I believe, Miss Morton, you are the only person present that has not seen this gentleman; what do you think of him from our description?"

"Indeed," said Miss Morton, "I am excessively puzzled—let me consider—what have you made him out to be? Retired, sociable, rude, civil, complaisant, satirical, wise, nonsensical, engaged, and a dangler. One may perhaps be curious to see a person who reconciles these contradictions, but, I think, one probably should not like him."

The subject was then dropped, after each had concurred in the reflection, that in in a very short time they should be presented with an ample opportunity of forming or re-modelling their various opinions of the person in question.

CHAPTER II.

There are but three ways for a man to revenge himself of the censure of the world; to despise it, to return the like, or to endeavour to live so as to avoid it. The first of these is usually pretended: the last is almost impossible; the universal practice is for the second,

SWIFT.

AT Lacy Park, a fine old place, situated in one of the midland counties of England, about thirty miles from the residence of Lord Appleby, lived Sir William Lacy, a baronet of the honourable creation of 1611, of ancient family, and ample fortune. At the period at which our tale commences, he was "somewhat inclining to three-score," and in addition to the above mentioned external advantages, was blessed with good health, a wife who seldom thwarted him, a promising son of about four and twenty, and a daughter one year older, who was happily married to the only son of a late friend and neighbour. He also enjoyed the most perfect independence, was not burthened either with parliamentary duties, or the thankless office of a justice of the peace, had few calls upon his attention from the affairs of others, and had a steward, in whom he placed such reliance, as to feel himself bound to bestow very little upon his own. If leisure, therefore, be mainly conducive to a life of happiness, Sir William Lacy may be fairly presumed to have attained it: for no one probably had his time more thoroughly at his own dis-

posal, or pursued with greater regularity his even tenor of self-indulgence. He was a man of good abilities, but great indolence, an indolence which, though comparatively little apparent during the volatile period of youth, or even in the vigour of mature manhood, had acquired a visible influence during his later years. His very virtues savoured of it: they were all passive. He was good-humoured, purely because it was too much trouble to be vexed; and though he had but little active generosity, and never volunteered a gift, he seldom resisted even an unreasonable request. He had a considerable fund of native humour, and though he never exerted himself to shine in conversation, his remarks were generally pointed and amusing. He had drawn copious stores from books, and was at the same time a shrewd observer of passing events, and the conduct and character of others. He had never been a man of pleasure, nor had he any thing in common with that class, except a thorough hatred of business. His habits were literary; that is to say, he was one of those who amuse themselves in skimming the ever varying surface of literature, in glancing over new publications, and culling entertaining trifles from the pages of reviews and magazines.

The productions of his pen were short and various. Divers of his poetical *jeux d'esprit* were dispersed in albums. He had written one article in a magazine now defunct, and had addressed a letter to Sylvanus Urban, describing a live toad that was found in a stone quarry on his estate. He had begun many political pamphlets; but always, either the time went by, or he changed his opinion, or grew tired of the subject before he had finished it. These pursuits amused, and in some degree occupied him; and, at any rate, they cheated

him into a belief that if his body was supine, his mind, at least, was active.

When young, Sir William mixed much with the world, and seemed fond of society; but since his marriage, finding, probably, that the hospitalities of life entailed upon him greater exertion than during the unshackled period of his celibacy, or that time had deprived society of its zest, he became a stout supporter of seclusion, discontinued from time to time the expected calls and invitations which civility demanded towards his neighbours, till friend after friend dropped off, and he found himself at the expiration of twenty years, in the centre of a large and hospitable neighbourhood, almost in a state of solitude.

Meanwhile, there was one passion which, though generally of too turbulent a nature to be the companion of indolence, had attained a rapid growth, and been fostered by this very seclusion. This passion was pride. Mixing little with his equals and superiors, and communing chiefly with his own mind, or with his inferiors in age, talent, or station, what wonder if he became inflated with a high sense of his own importance? Mortifications also reached him. He could not but be sensible that the world which he had long neglected, had in return neglected him. He endeavoured to feel the proud contempt of injured merit, to think how much happier he was in himself, than the vain pleasures of society could make him, and to "dash the world aside, and bid it pass."

But these efforts were generally fruitless. Often of late, would he sigh for civilities, which he had once denounced as troublesome, and long to resume that station, which, when once lost, was not easily regained. Besides, he felt that the first step must now be made by him, and this step he

scorned to take; and pride rivetted those chains which indolence had first imposed. Thus, though naturally a good-natured, easy, cheerful man, he became testy and irascible, tenderly suspicious of neglect and insult, and ready to trace in the most innocent conduct of his neighbours a disposition to affront him.

Lady Lacy was a well disposed woman, of weak judgment and strong prejudices. Her chief defect, was a love of petty mystery, through which she frequently magnified trifles, and sometimes produced misunderstandings, which she had not the ability to repair. She was an excessive wonderer at nothings, and though with scarce sufficient discernment to protect her from the most obvious snare, though herself shrewd and politic, and could generally discover deep and hidden motives for the simplest actions. Bating a little prying love of scandal, she took a charitable pleasure in the welfare of her neighbours, and was unimpeachable in her exercise of the important duties of wife and mother.

Sir William and Lady Lacy had only one son and one daughter, of whom the latter was married, much to the satisfaction of her parents, to Mr. Hartley, a young man of good fortune in that neighbourhood. Mrs. Hartley was in most respect the converse of her mother, quick and intelligent, somewhat decisive in her tone, and masculine in her modes of thinking. She was handsome, elegant, and well-bred, and nothing was requisite but a slight diminution of coldness and bluntness, to make her at all times very agreeable.

Herbert Lacy differed from his parents in many respects, as widely as his sister did. To all the intelligence and literary taste of Sir William Lacy, he added the mental vigour and physical activity

which his father wanted. He was rapid, perhaps hasty, in his judgments; but he had a mind which eagerly sought conviction, and never cherished with puny partiality, a preconceived opinion, or feared to retract an erroneous assertion. He was generous, open, unsuspicious, lively, and enterprising, somewhat fickle in his pursuits, but ardent in the furtherance of them. He was perhaps rather too much dazzled with the specious lustre of versatile accomplishments, and ambitious of the reputation of knowing a little of every thing; a reputation which most of his acquaintance were ready to grant him. His manners were agreeable, and his conversation varied and amusing.

His father's seclusion had not influenced Herbert's habits; and, considering his youth, he had been a good deal seen in the world, and had a tolerably extensive acquaintance with the best society. He had nicely honourable feelings, some pride of birth, a good deal of fastidiousness, and a disposition to *hauteur*, towards those whom he disliked. His habits were naturally sociable, and he had just that proper proportion of vanity, which creates in some degree the "*besoin de succès*," and prompts its possessor to put in requisition his powers of pleasing. He saw with pain, the indolent seclusion to which his father had doomed himself, and lamented it the more when he perceived its unhappy effect upon his mind, in producing a feeling of morbid pride, to which he would otherwise have been a stranger. At first, he was disposed to think, that there was little cause for this irritable dread of neglect, and doubted not that his father still maintained his proper station in the estimation of his neighbours. But a county meeting, to which Sir William, with some difficulty, consented to accompany his son, tended to alter this opinion. Her-

bert Lacy then perceived to his sorrow, that, though some outward civility was displayed towards his father, there were few indications of friendship or respect. He was viewed by his neighbours, as one who has awakened from a long trance, and could neither know nor care much, concerning any subject in which they felt most interested.

Many did not know him, and few that did were cordial in their manner. They made punctilious inquiries after Lady Lacy; and then the speakers would turn away, as if they had discharged their duty, and enter into cheerful converse with those with whom they had broken bread, and mixed in active scenes and useful labours that afforded subjects of mutual interest. Herbert saw that these demonstrations of indifference, were not lost upon his father, and that, in spite of his assumed cheerfulness, they mortified him deeply. He sincerely hoped that wounded pride would urge him to regain that consideration to which but for his own besetting sin, he was so justly entitled: but alas! it operated to his disadvantage, as such a passion always does; and with grief, did Herbert hear him denounce his neighbours, as a tiresome set of senseless bores; ridicule with no inconsiderable humour the objects and conduct of the meeting, and profess his resolution, never again to subject himself to the useless penance of herding with such a band of uncongenial spirits.

Encountered, as Sir William Lacy was, on almost every side, with the just retaliation of neglect, it is creditable to state, that there was but one family whom he regarded with any feeling of enmity. The head of this obnoxious house was Mr. Morton, a gentleman as little resembling him in his modes of life as in dignity of descent. Mr.

Morton's father, a man of mean extraction, had accumulated a considerable fortune in the iron trade, and having appropriated a large part of it to the purchase of the Dodswell estate, property situated not far from Lacy Park, had early endeavoured to sink the manufacturer in the country gentleman; and being ambitious of securing to his son those advantages in which he himself was deficient, spared no expense in his education, pushed him onward into the polite world, and urged him to cultivate the society of persons of rank, and if possible to ennoble his escutcheon by a dignified alliance. All this his son, the present Mr. Morton, succeeded in performing; for he soon got into possession of a large and fashionable acquaintance, and eventually married Lady Louisa Eustace, daughter of the Duke of Swansea.

Mr. Morton was a man of gentlemanly manners and prepossessing appearance. To education and society he owed much; but Nature, which does not always disdain to bestow the most aristocratic distinctions of face and figure, on those whose claims cannot be ratified by the Herald's College, had been highly liberal to Mr. Morton; and he certainly bore, in a remarkable degree, that subtle, indefinable grace, which bespeaks at once the gentleman. To this he chiefly owed his success, for though a man of pleasure, he was not strictly one of gaiety, and though from a knowledge of the world, and a consequent fund of anecdote, he was tolerably pleasing, he never contributed much to the entertainment of any one, or could justly receive other than the undistinguishing praise of good-breeding. His talents were, perhaps, rather above than below mediocrity; but he had never been urgently called upon to exert them, and they were, therefore, less efficient than they might have

been. Of pride, he had no small portion; and it was, perhaps, rendered more vigilant by the reflection that he was maintaining a station in society, to which neither his birth, his fortune, nor his talents, viewed singly, might seem to entitle him.

Such a person would naturally be irritated by the cool and careless treatment which he experienced from Sir William Lacy, a man superior in rank and descent, and whose inhospitality it was therefore obvious to attribute to pride. At the same time, the baronet felt more jealous than he was disposed to admit, of the popularity and influence which this low-born person had obtained in the neighbourhood.

A number of trifling causes also contributed, on either side, to swell the amount of their respective grievances. In the first place, Mr. Morton had been an unsuccessful suitor of Lady Lacy's; and, shortly after his marriage, thought proper to betray his resentment, by repulsive treatment of that lady. Moreover, on an argument which once took place between the gentlemen, Sir William unfortunately let fall a compliment to Mr. Morton upon his skill in *irony*. The baronet was notoriously addicted to punning, and was thought to have uttered the remark with a sly significance of manner; but, though appearances were against him, the offence was really unintentional. Mr. Morton, however, thought otherwise; and this equivocal allusion to his father's trade galled his pride severely; the more perhaps, because it was too questionable an affront to be openly noticed. Soon afterwards, Sir William Lacy, who, as lord of a neighbouring manor, had the right of fishing in a river which flowed for some distance through the property of Mr. Morton, wishing to exercise his right, sent his keeper with a request to the latter to be allowed to enter upon his lands. Mr. Morton, forgetting for a

while his usual guarded courtesy, replied that Sir William Lacy's people had full liberty to fish the river; but that, in justice to his tenants, whose crops were now in a state of forwardness, he must positively forbid them from setting their foot on either bank.

These were some of the petty circumstances which sowed disunion in the breasts of two men whose pleasing manners and gentlemanly habits ought to have produced a mutual friendship. It would have been fortunate, perhaps, had there been any one great ground of offence in place of the trivial causes which now existed. There would then have been something to forgive and forget; hands would have been shaken, and they would have been better friends in consequence. But now there was nothing to warrant enmity, and a great deal which seemed to justify dislike, and upon which they could never come to an explanation, because they would each have been ashamed of allowing that any one circumstance had ever dwelt in their recollection. Therefore, after debarring themselves of all proper means of fairly estimating each other's character, they sat down in satisfied dislike, each investing the other with disagreeable attributes of their own choosing. Sir William Lacy regarded Mr. Morton as an ill-bred, assuming, low-minded person; while that gentleman viewed the baronet as proud, cynical, illiberal, and selfish.

Lady Louisa Morton was a weak, dawdling woman, who, having naturally rather delicate health, indulged in playing the invalid till she became at last almost as incapable of exertion as she would fain have been believed. She was not unamiable, but had many of the petty faults to which a weak mind, under the influence of indolence and ill health, is naturally exposed. She had five children living, two sons and three daughters.

The eldest daughter, Lady Malvern, was now about four-and-twenty; a pretty woman, not positively unamiable, but rather spoilt, with no little vanity and pretension, and an uneasy aspiration after fashionable distinction. She was fond of her husband and her sister Agnes, to whom she was an active chaperon, and whom she was proud of producing, though not so proud as she was of being the daughter-in-law of Lady Rodborough, whom she thought the first of human beings, and who treated her with great contempt. Agnes was about four years younger, and had herself a younger sister, Marianne, then about fifteen. The two sons were of the intermediate ages, of twenty-three and eighteen. The eldest was *attaché* to an embassy. The youngest, who was destined for the church, was just entered at Oxford.

Agnes, the second daughter, had lived very little with her parents. At an early age she had been adopted by Mrs. Denham, sister of Mr. Morton, who had married a man of good fortune, and who, having no children, entreated Lady Louisa and her brother to give up to her their second daughter. The prospects held out by this proposal were such as inclined them to accede to it; and the little Agnes was consequently resigned to the tuition of her aunt, who, being a woman of good principles and strong sense, gave to her niece an education in every respect excellent, and infinitely better than she could have received under the feeble administration of Lady Louisa.

Mrs. Denham became a widow soon after this precious charge devolved upon her: she, however, long survived her husband, and had now been dead about two years, Agnes being at the period of that event little more than seventeen. She left handsome legacies to the brothers and sisters of her adopted charge, and to several of her own friends

and relations; but the bulk of her fortune amounting to eighty thousand pounds, was settled upon Agnes and her issue, and, in failure of issue, was to be divided at her death between her brothers and sisters, and their children. Other conditions were annexed to the bequest. The money was vested in two trustees, who were also appointed her guardians, and four hundred a year was to be paid to her out of it, till she arrived at the age of twenty-four, at which time she was to be entitled to the annual interest of the whole.

She was also to become entitled to the whole income of her fortune upon her marriage previous to that age, provided that such marriage was contracted with the consent of her guardians and trustees. But if she married without their consent before she arrived at the age of twenty-four, she was to forfeit all but the sum of ten thousand pounds, and the remainder was to go to her brothers and sisters, and their children, as before mentioned. The trustees were Mr. Sackville, a relation of the late Mr. Denham, a man of considerable talent, and an intimate friend of the family, and Mr. Hawksworth, an elderly gentleman of great respectability. To each of these were left bequests; and to Mr. Sackville in particular, the house and surrounding estates.

CHAPTER III.

'Tis safest to begin with a little aversion.

The Rivals.

WE must now return to Huntley Park, where we shall find the hour of dinner fast approaching, and the party re-appearing after their dispersion for the business of the toilette. Agnes Morton could not help looking, with some curiosity, round the rooms in search of the object of their previous conversation, but saw, hitherto, none but well known faces. At length the door of an adjoining room was opened, and she saw enter a young man, rather short and fat, with a face of irresistible good humour, and a manner which, with all its oddity, seemed admirably suited to the person it belonged to. If this was Lacy, she thought the judgment rather too favourable which had commended his good looks; but scarcely had she settled this point than, "Hartley, how are you?" burst at once from several quarters.

"You have been hiding of late," said Mr. Tyrwhitt. "In what part of the world were you to be seen?"

"Seen! I hardly know," said the character; "I saw myself in the glass every morning—but you would hardly have found any thing like me there." Then, moving on towards Lady Appleby, he uttered a good deal of laughable nonsense in the form of messages, which he pretended that Mrs. Hartley had charged him to deliver.

"I am glad," said her ladyship, "that you have brought Mr. Lacy with you. I hope you have brought him safe and well."

"I hope so, I'm sure," said he gravely. "I took all possible care of him; I had him labelled with 'glass,' and, 'to be kept dry,' and 'this side uppermost,' which is all one can do for any parcel. I consigned him, with the rest of the luggage, to the care of my people, and I conclude—Oh, here he is."

Agnes was within hearing, and turning as he spoke, saw a young man advance towards them, whose appearance agreeably exceeded her expectations. She also perceived that his exterior was not new to her, and that, without knowing his name, she had often met him in London crowds. She could not tell whether he was tall or short, but she could easily decide the question whether he was plain or handsome. His features were good, even when at rest; but when lighted up with animation, few could refuse to admire them; and to these he added the graces of a manner which it is difficult to define, otherwise than in saying that, to an experienced eye, under any disguise of mean attire, or low association, it would have betrayed at once the gentleman.

"Mr. Lacy," said Lady Appleby, who had been manufacturing a speech from the moment she saw him enter the room, "I have had great pleasure in receiving from your brother-in-law such excellent accounts of our good friends Sir William and Lady Lacy, who I hear are now enjoying perfect health at their charming place at Lacy Park. I assure you this intelligence is a great compensation for our loss of the expected pleasure of seeing them here; a pleasure on which we had long counted, for it has always been a high satisfaction to Lord Appleby and myself to receive under this roof any member of your family."

Lacy bowed, and smiled.

“Even you—do you understand?” said Hartley, half aloud.

Lacy gave a quick glance to check him; and controlling a strong disposition to quizzery, which lurked in the twinkling corners of his eyes, took a seat by Lady Appleby, and accommodated himself, with much politeness of attention, to the involutions of that lady’s oratory until he was relieved by the announcement of dinner.

At table Lacy found himself seated next to Lady Malvern, a lady whom he disliked, and whom he had previously acknowledged merely with a cold bow. There was little disposition on either side to say more than politeness absolutely required; and Lacy, during the first part of the repast, fell considerably in that lady’s estimation, by seeming to prefer to her own superior conversation the childish babble of the second Miss Tyrwhitt. The dislike of the Mortons, which he had always been encouraged to entertain, had caused him to see the foibles of Lady Malvern perhaps in rather too strong a light; particularly that affectation of finery, to which he thought she had so little pretension. She had also, on more than one occasion, accosted him with an air of lofty coldness, awkwardly copied from Lady Rodborough, which though Lacy internally ridiculed, he could not entirely brook. Now that he saw her more closely, he was more disposed to be amused with her character than angry at her treatment of him. He therefore turned at length to talk to her, and by a happy selection of subjects, and permitting her to enlarge upon the perfections of the Rodborough family, and many dear friends of high consideration, he soon gained a much better place in her good graces than she was ever likely to obtain in his.

Agnes, who sat at some distance, saw with surprise the gradual effect which Lacy’s conversation

seemed to have in softening the aversion of her sister; and, knowing that she was by no means a skillful dissembler, and could not exhibit much more graciousness than she really felt, she was early induced to rate highly those powers of pleasing which could so soon disarm such strong dislike. While thinking thus, she began to question whether she herself should be won over with equal ease to the side of the enemy, as she then called him. She trusted, not. With all proper modesty and humility, she could not but be sensible that her own capacity was superior to her sister's, and that she was less liable to be blinded by a few specious, well applied civilities. Indignant, by anticipation, at the prospect of any attempt to invade her judgment by a system of cajolery, she was at that moment predisposed to do infinitely less than justice to any agreeable qualities that she might afterwards discover in Mr. Lacy. Perhaps, at the same time, she was somewhat apprehensive of her own weakness, or she would not have thus meditated a defence before there was any prospect of being assailed.

Lacy, on his part, had not been unobservant, and Agnes quickly caught his eye. Well might his attention rest on her, for in her he saw one possessed of no slight personal advantages. She was just of such a height as to escape the character of a tall person, and had a graceful carriage, and an elegant figure. Though not decidedly a brunette, she partook of that complexion much more than of the blonde. Her hair was black, her eyes deep blue, her neck and forehead beautifully white; in short, without flattery or exaggeration, she might be pronounced extremely handsome. What wonder, then, if Lacy's looks were turned with admiration towards an object so attractive; or that he watched with interest those sparkling eyes, that beamed with such vivacity and intelligence; or that beautiful mouth, that seemed formed to utter only agree-

able things. He soon became curious to know her name, which he had not hitherto ascertained.

Introductions are now in such disuse, and all the members of a party are left so frequently to become acquainted as they can, that this circumstance, considering that, including the ten minutes before dinner, he had not yet passed half an hour in the company of Agnes, will not appear surprising. He therefore asked Lady Malvern, in a low tone, whether the young lady on the other side of the table was any relation of the Tyrwhitts. The communication which followed gave any thing rather than satisfaction; and Lacy internally sighed to think that one who seemed so elegant should be a member of the low-born house of Morton. Lady Malvern, one of whose best points was a great admiration and affection for her sister, increased the force of his unfavourable impressions by various remarks, the chief and very visible object of which was to exhibit Agnes to the best advantage. Lacy remarked, that, though hitherto ignorant of Miss Morton's name, he remembered to have seen her at parties in town.

"Yes," said Lady Malvern, carelessly, "I suppose you may have met her, though she did not go about much. She was seen only at a few places; for, in fact, I always strongly objected to her throwing herself away upon small balls and second rate routs; and there are so many of that description, one is compelled to draw a strict line."

"It is very advisable," said Lacy: "I wish others would be as strict. It is the only way to check pretension."

"Ah—true, true," added Lady Malvern, little suspecting the double bearing of his remark; "and I must say, that in spite of all the common, vulgar outcry about finery and exclusiveness, I cannot see any thing of it myself. I should say there was not enough. It really is quite melancholy to see the

creatures that come to Almack's. How they get there nobody knows. Begging Lady Cheltenham's pardon, I suspect it is partly her fault; and I could not help telling her so once. 'Now, Lady Cheltenham,' I said, 'you are really too good-natured—you won't refuse any body—as for myself, I am quite afraid of even hinting any thing I wish; indeed,' I said, 'you positively must not give Agnes another subscription.' But she only laughed, and told me she could not afford to lose her, for there was a terrible dearth of beauty."

Lady Malvern then went on to describe that lady very accurately, for Lacy's better information, little suspecting that he was both an acquaintance and a relation. A knowledge of the latter fact he well knew would have raised him greatly in her opinion, but of that opinion he felt at this moment so regardless, that he did not condescend to tell her. The disgust which he conceived for the silly assumption of Lady Malvern, was now allowed to operate very unjustly to the prejudice of her sister; and Lacy was too early prepared to find in her the same weak fluttering vanity—the same restless ambition to gloss over with borrowed finery the real insignificance of her extraction. He saw great indications of elegance in the appearance of Agnes, and he was somewhat uncharitably disposed to think that this refinement was but tinsel, which would not bear the test of examination, and thinly covered real vulgarity.

Nursed in lofty aristocratic feelings, and carefully encouraged by his father in opinions so flattering to himself, Herbert was inclined to place the prerogative of birth rather higher than is usual with those who had trodden, like himself, the levelling maze of fashionable society. He had been taught invariably to connect vulgarity with low extraction; and he could not divest himself sufficiently of that impression, or give due weight to

the effect and influence of wealth and education, which are alike open to all in this free and enlightened country. The usages of society might have taught him, that if any credentials were now necessary to obtain admission to a London drawing-room, the rent-roll would generally be demanded in preference to the pedigree. But this was a fact to which he had either shut his eyes, or viewed it as a strange and improper anomaly; and as the error flattered his self-love, he had hitherto continued in it. He was in the present instance rather proud of the sturdiness of his principles, in not being dazzled by the outward charms of the grand-daughter of an ironmonger; and never suspected his own illiberality in condemning her unheard because her family had lately risen by honest industry, and an elder sister, for whose manners she could not be accountable, was a silly, vain, affected woman. Throughout the remainder of the evening, therefore, he studiously preserved this resolute indifference, and never attempted to discover whether the mental graces of Agnes Morton bore any proportion to her personal ones. In fact, several hours had elapsed without their having exchanged a syllable: but there were many other persons to talk to, and the circumstance was probably unknown to all but themselves.

Music was in due time proposed, and Agnes, who was an accomplished musician, sung and played a good deal, and in a style with which Lacy, who had an accurate musical taste, ought to have been much pleased. But Lacy was otherwise disposed. He never even approached her during any of her performances, or ejaculated a single praise, or asked the name of the last song. However, as gentlemen are not compelled by the rules of modern society either to listen or admire, he could seem perfectly inattentive without any breach of good-breeding. He was in his most fastidious mood, perversely

bent upon discovering a tinge of vulgarity in all that Miss Morton said or did. He questioned with himself, whether she did not even sing and play rather too professionally well, and saw in her prompt, unaffected readiness to gratify her friends, only an indelicate fondness for display. It cannot be supposed that, in the mean time, Lacy had gained much ground in the good opinion of Agnes. Her sister had certainly seemed to relax from her repulsiveness during dinner; but she had hitherto uttered nothing in his favour: for though Lady Malvern was now really disposed to like him, she had too great a love of consistency to praise one whom she had so lately thought proper to censure.

Agnes, therefore, saw in Lacy nothing more than a gentlemanly young man, who would not condescend to notice her, and had certainly shown no taste for music. Of his conversation, as he was seldom near her, she had few opportunities of judging. The chief specimens which she heard were a discussion with Mrs. Poole about the intermarriages and relationships of a set of people she did not know, and a little small talk with Miss Tyrwhitts, which was carefully adapted to the calibre of that young lady's small understanding. Between herself and him nothing passed which deserved the name of conversation. Once it happened that she was asking the name of somebody's place, which those whom she spoke to could not tell her. Lacy supplied the information: she thanked him; and then each turned to talk to some one else; and this was all that was said by each to the other in the whole course of that evening.

CHAPTER IV.

What if he has made a ridiculous gimcrack of his house and gardens : you know his heart is set upon it : and could not you commend his taste?

Three Weeks after Marriage.

A mischievous error in education is, that children are plagued with a great deal of useless knowledge, while the most important objects are overlooked.

SPURZHEIM.

It is difficult to say how long Lacy would have preserved this distant demeanor had he not been drawn into a closer communication with Agnes Morton, by an arrangement which was made on the following morning. Lady Appleby and Mrs. Poole had agreed to call upon their common friends the Bingleys, and Agnes had engaged to accompany them. A gentleman was wanted to complete the party, and as her ladyship and Mrs. Poole both fixed upon Lacy as the most desirable companion, he was pressed to fill the fourth seat in their barouche.

The party set out; Lady Appleby all civility—Mrs. Poole all good humour—Agnes in cheerful spirits, and Lacy perfectly well disposed *de faire les fraise de la conversation*. His fastidious caution of the preceding evening was lost in the animation of the present moment, and he soon found himself undesignedly, and unconsciously talking with lively interest to Agnes. It was greatly in her favour that Lady Malvern was not of the par-

ty, for her presence would infallibly have preserved Lacy in that haughty system of circumspection which he had prescribed to himself.

At length, they arrived at Castleglass Abbey, the seat of the Bingleys, a place which, though its name was compounded of Castle and Abbey, had very little of the appearance of either, and in fact was so called only from occupying the site of an ancient monastery. It was a long, low, Italian villa, in the most recent state of incompleteness, built with verandas, and projecting roofs, and various contrivances to alleviate the intensity of that sun, which in this country so seldom shines, and having an airy unsubstantial character, which was any thing but attractive in that most uncomfortable of all times, a cold day in summer. The situation was but moderately pretty; and the place, which had not at all the character of a show place, was now seen to great disadvantage. It had a raw, unfinished air throughout: on all sides was a great deal that was to be beautiful some time or other, but very little that was so at present. Newly gravelled walks, visible throughout all their curves, twined among large expanses of coarse turf, which was variously chequered with brown diagrams, looking like selections from the Chinese puzzle, that went by the name of flower-beds. Beyond these were extensive red, sandy tracts, where the nakedness of the land was as yet but ill concealed by the small, thirsty-looking evergreens, which, with due allowance for future growth, were sparingly dotted over it.

They entered the house, which still smelt of paint and whitewash, and were introduced into the presence of Mrs. Bingley. This lady was not very distinguishable from the great mass of good sort of women. Her best quality in society was a disposition to please, and to be pleased: and this is a quality which justly compensates for a very great

inferiority of social powers. In Mrs. Bingley, however, a wish to view the bright side of every circumstance, added to a nervous eagerness to be lively and agreeable, sometimes produced results, which closely verged upon the ludicrous. In the present instance, after the first greetings, mutual inquiries took their usual precedence of other conversation.

“Thank you,” said Mrs. Bingley, “we are quite well now, but we have been shockingly ill, I assure you. It must have been an epidemic, something contagious in the air, for we all had it—every one. There was Mr. Bingley, and I, and Edmund, and Jane, and Louisa, and Margaret, and Arthur—we were all ill together—it was so droll!”

She then went on to relate how ludicrously they had been tormented with smoke, and the exquisite joke of having a new white marble chimney-piece spoiled by it. She showed them the stains for their entertainment, and said, with a laugh, that they would never come out. The new house afforded ample matter for conversation; and as all her visitors politely expressed a curiosity respecting its arrangements, so was the lady perfectly ready to gratify them, by a full display of the whole of it. Far from wishing them to receive any thing upon her bare assertion, she insisted upon their seeing all with their own eyes; and leaving Lacy in an unfurnished drawing room, with a roll of plans to entertain him, carried off the ladies, to convince them, by ocular proof, that the bed-rooms were exactly of the number and size which she described.

These inflictions being over, Mr. Bingley made his appearance, and being assured that his lady had done the honours of the interior, proposed to conduct them through the grounds. This, however,

the ladies declined: fatigue, recent rain, thin shoes, and fear of wet, were among the principal excuses, and the hope of another opportunity was held out as a consolation to Mr. Bingley. But there was no such escape for Lacy: he could neither be tired, nor fearful of wet, and could look for no other opportunity. In addition to this, Lady Appleby, whose compliments, by some strange fatality, were generally ill-timed, made frequent appeals to his well known taste, and assured her friends, that the improvements in the approach at Lord Westburn's had been made upon his sole suggestion. He was therefore fastened upon by Mr. Bingley, who professed a great wish to consult his judgment. There was no resisting such an assurance, and Lacy was forced to comply, exchanging with Agnes a look of comic despair, as he was hurried out of the room.

Mr. Bingley was that well known animal, a proser; and in addition to the defect of an incontinence of words, had a considerable want of fluency in the delivery of them. Lacy had a little of his father's susceptibility to annoyances of this nature, and he was quick in estimating the colloquial powers of his conductor, he soon discovered the disagreeableness of his prospects.

"Ay," said Mr. Bingley in answer to some civil things which Lacy said as they walked together from the house, "to be sure a great deal has been done, and I only wish that you could see what the place was, before all these improvements were made. It was not like the same thing. That lane, which runs beyond the hedge, near the two large firs in the field yonder, used to run between that sunk fence, and the farthest clump of those three. In the nearest corner of those meadows was an ancient fishpond, now filled up; and the farm buildings, which are now out of sight, behind the

edge of the hill to the left, used to stand in the middle of the lake—it was not a lake then, you understand. Then only look at the land in the valley on each side of the approach—what do you think that used to be? A swamp, Sir, positively a swamp. Well, what did I do?—I set to work and drained it—drained it all on both sides—turned a twenty-inch culvert in the centre of the hollow, and carried my carriage-road right across it. I will tell you a circumstance about that culvert: I had a layer-out of grounds here, a very positive sort of fellow. He was for two feet: I stood up for twenty inches. We argued the point for several days, but at last I succeeded in convincing him that twenty inches would do exactly, and it did do, and it has done: and there is my approach running over the middle of it.”

Lacy, anxious to change the subject, then adverted to his house. “You cannot conceive,” said Mr. Bingley, “how superior it is to the house I pulled down. I wish you could have seen that house. If I knew where to lay my hand upon it, I should like to show you the plan of it. I will try if I can get it for you; I think it would entertain you.”

“You are very good,” said Lacy, “but I should be sorry to give you that trouble. I think I could hardly feel greater interest in your present house, even if I were to see the plan you mention. A good house does not require to be set off by the contrast of a bad one.”

Mr. Bingley assented, and forbore to threaten him any longer with the plan. “And now, Sir,” said he, taking Lacy by the arm, and carefully placing him in a proper position, “just cast your eyes—ay, there—in that direction, and now tell me your opinion. Does any thing strike you in that view, as admitting of improvement? I wish to profit by your judgment.”

“Indeed,” said Lacy, after a modest disclaimer

of any pretensions to superior judgment, "I hardly know how to suggest anything—the view seems to be almost perfect: and it will soon lose what is perhaps its only blot when that building is gone, which I see you are now pulling down."

"Pulling down! my dear Sir! those people are building it up—that is my new ruin—you don't consider—one must have a ruin—surely you don't object to that!"

"Certainly not," replied Lacy. "It will be quite in character with your other improvements. My only fear was, that it might be rather too much in sight—but I suppose you are going to plant a part of it out."

"Sir, it *is* half planted out already. Why only look—there, just before—no, I forget—I beg your pardon—you cannot see the trees from hence—but if you will just step fifty yards further, you will see how judiciously it will be partly concealed," and taking Lacy by the arm, he led him to the spot, where he detained him no little time with a minute dissertation upon ruins.

Lacy's stock of patience was now almost exhausted, yet he still continued to listen to his companion with a tolerable air of attention. He also tried to quicken his progress by his own ready comprehension. But it was in vain that Lacy displayed his ingenuity in anticipating the explanations of Mr. Bingley; for, as habitual stammerers are notoriously unwilling to accept the assistance of those who are content with half a sentence, or volunteer to finish it for them, so this gentleman was equally averse to any attempts to relieve his mental hesitation; and after Lacy had briefly expressed what he was going to say, was seldom satisfied without repeating the same idea in other words. Foiled in this endeavour to shorten his term of penance, Lacy, as a last resource, ventured to intimate that his time was not his own, and that he must attend

Lady Appleby. To this Mr. Bingley could offer no objection, though he ventured to throw in his way the last possible impediment by taking him the longest way back.

At length they reached the house, where they found the ladies anxiously expecting their return. Even Mrs. Poole's current of small talk had begun to fail; and Lady Appleby looked as if she would have found it a great relief to feel at liberty to yawn. Miss Morton looked placid and pretty, but was evidently wearied out of all animation; and Mrs. Bingley, deprived of the resources of locomotion, began to find the entertainment of her guests an irksome task. Unfortunately they declined luncheon; and as she could not set them down to eat, she been compelled to summon the nursery to her aid, and fill up the time by displaying the various proficiencies of her offspring.

Mrs. Bingley was the mother of five fine children, the eldest about seven years old, all fortunately at hand, and ready to be shown. She was a good mother—that is to say, good with regard to her intentions—very anxious for the welfare of her children, and indefatigable in her attention to them. But she was too sanguine and somewhat impatient, had little judgment in the direction of her efforts, and seemed to think that too much of a good thing could never be done or expected. She had imbibed many wise maxims about teaching youth betimes, and instilling the seeds of early knowledge, all of which she applied rather too forcibly; and bitten with a mania for education, wanted to see her infant flock start up into little men and women, almost as soon as they could walk and talk. She had also that nervous impression, which over anxious mothers are apt to entertain, that nothing relating to them could possibly go on well, except under her immediate eye.

Her whole family, consisting of two boys and

three daughters (the youngest a baby in the arms,) were brought in to be discussed and admired. They made their bows and curtseys at the door, and came forwards with their little heads poked up, as if the collar were still at their chins, and the backboard at their shoulders.

"Here," said the mother, introducing Miss Louisa, a little curly-headed thing of four years and a half old; "here is a little lady, who I am afraid likes her dolls better than her books—don't you, Louy?" kissing her.

The visitors exclaimed at her forwardness, and wondered that she should be able to read at all. "Oh, she has been able to read this long time," said Mrs. Bingley; "but I am afraid," she added, looking very grave, "she does not always understand what she reads, and *that* is of the utmost consequence—go, and shut the anti-room door, Louy. She is a quick child," pursued Mrs. Bingley, when she thought Louy was out of hearing, "very quick, but wants application. The fact is she is too volatile."

"A serious fault at four years old," observed Mrs. Poole.

"Yes, indeed," said Mrs. Bingley, very innocently, "for I am confident, that much depends upon forming the character early. Jane, here," drawing towards her a demure, pretty looking child, on the verge of six—"has much more steadiness of character. She is a very good girl, though I wish she showed more taste for music. I tell her every body likes music—how comes it that Jane does not? I dare say Miss Morton likes music—go to that lady, my love, and ask her."

Encouraged by the engaging smile of Agnes, the little musician sidled up to her, asked her the question, and received the required assurance.

"And have you dot a tarryplaster?" said the incredulous child, looking inquiringly in her face.

“Chiroplast, Jane; you must learn to say chiroplast. No, Miss Morton does not want a chiroplast, no more will you, when you can play better. She does not like the chiroplast ma’am, though she took to it wonderfully at first. I had her taught upon Logier’s system; I have spared no pains in giving her an early taste for music. I took her last spring to see the infant Lyra—I thought it would excite her emulation. Do you remember the little Lyra Jane? When will you do anything like that? Only think how well that little girl played upon that great harp!”

“But her harp is not so big as my piano forte,” said the little musician, rather piqued by the comparison.

“True, my love, but she plays it better. Edward, my dear, don’t touch that—and do stand straight, or you will grow quite crooked. Come here; hold yourself up, as the soldiers do. We think him very like his father—but you must not pull those faces—you don’t look like papa when you do so.”

Mrs. Poole and Lady Appleby, nevertheless, professed themselves much struck with the likeness to Mr. Bingley. Agnes could not find it out, and avoided the question, by inquiring Master Edmund’s age.

“Seven, next month,” said Mrs. Bingley. “We think of sending him soon to school—Mr. Bingley wishes it—I am sure it is more than I do—for I dare say he will not learn so much as at home.—In fact, it is my plan to be always teaching them some little thing, and not to let an hour slip without putting something into their heads, and by all means to give them a habit of asking questions. Edmund was asking me this morning about the weather-glass: why it falls in rainy weather.—Do you remember Edmund? Why does the glass fall?”

“It is not the glass, it is the quicksilver as falls,”

said Master Edmund, with the matured confidence of seven years old.

“‘*As falls!*’ *that falls.* Mind your English.—And what makes the quicksilver fall?”

“The weight of the air,” said the young philosopher.

“Very well remembered, Edmund. You see”—turning to her visitors, “you see the nature of my system. There is no doing children proper justice without being constantly *at* them.”

At this moment the nurse entered to summon the children to their dinner; and they were reluctantly dismissed by their admiring parent, though not without receiving her parting directions to make their obeisances in due form, and mind how they went out of the room. The little girls grasped their frocks, and dropped their retiring curtsies, at the imminent danger of tumbling backwards; and Master Edmund striding out sideways, to the full extent of one of his short legs, drew the other after it; then, after lowering his head to his knees, as if he were going to throw a summerset, regained once more an upright posture, and sidled out of the room according to directions, without turning his back on the company. Soon after this the gentlemen returned, and the visit was at length concluded.

“What a sweet woman Mrs. Bingley is!” said Lady Appleby, on her way homewards, “and what astonishing pains she takes with her children!”

“Lord! poor things!” exclaimed Mrs. Poole, “I think she overworks them sadly—I was quite sorry for the poor children. I dare say, as she says, she is always *at* them—I hate to see people so strict and particular, and cramming children so shockingly early. It is well, perhaps, that I have none, for if I had, I am afraid I should spoil them. I am fond of giving them a little indulgence—are not you, Miss Morton?”

“Of the two extremes,” said Agnes, “I pro-

bably should prefer indulgence. Severity, however, does not seem to be the faulty part of Mrs. Bingley's system. Her foible is rather that of being too anxious and attentive, and expecting more than is natural and necessary."

"I should not care," said Mrs. Poole, "how little was learnt, at that very early age."

"I will not go quite that length," replied Agnes. "I should certainly wish them to learn something; but I should think it was of more consequence to attend to their dispositions, and give them correct notions of right and wrong. I should be rather afraid of encouraging a feeling of rivalry. It would make them learn more; but it would be at the risk of injuring their tempers."

"Yes, I hate rivalry," pursued Mrs. Poole, "and also the system of showing them off—I am sure it must make them conceited. Children must be dull indeed if they don't get a high opinion of their own importance, from seeing themselves so much attended to. They will soon learn to fancy that they are entitled to more notice than they have any right to expect. Did you ever see such a self-sufficient little old man of a child, as they have made of Lord Langley, Lord and Lady Brereton's little boy? They have drilled, and crammed, and be-praised, and be-tutored the poor child, till he thinks himself as great as a prince of the blood."

"Like the little German Duke of R——," added Lacy, "who observed, with some surprise, that an old officer, who had come to see him was not embarrassed in his presence. But, Mrs. Poole, I don't think this self-sufficiency comes merely from over-tutoring. You will find, I dare say, many an ignorant child just as conceited as one that has been *crammed* from his cradle. However, I quite agree with what Miss Morton was saying about rivalry; and as for early prodigies, I suspect that they are of

little use but to gratify the vanity of parents and teachers,”

“Very likely,” said Miss Morton; “but it is an amiable kind of vanity, and one should not treat it very severely.”

Lacy assented, and with a look of more genuine approbation than he had hitherto bestowed upon her. He had been pleased with the simple tone of unaffected good sense, which her observations had evinced. The subject was by no means such as young men and young ladies, generally, discuss; and the style of the conversation had much more of a didactic character, than is often suffered to prevail. Perhaps, however, it had not the less effect on that account. Men are generally disposed to give ample credit to the other sex, for the possession of vivacity and a competent portion of the graces; but clear, natural good sense is a less obvious quality, and is therefore more prized by them, when unostentatiously displayed. Having broken the ice, Lacy talked a good deal to Agnes; was much pleased and amused with her remarks; and found himself irresistibly impressed with a very favourable opinion of her mental endowments.

CHAPTER V.

Why should I call 'em fools? The world thinks better of 'em; for these have quality, and education, wit, and fine conversation, and are received and admired by the world. If not, they like and admire themselves; and why is not that true wisdom?

CONGREVE.

THE first step towards the removal of dislike, is at once the most difficult and the most effectual, and this being taken, no other than a favourable result could be anticipated. But the prejudices of Lacy were as yet only softened, not disarmed; and though he could not refuse to acknowledge the beauty of Agnes, he was far from being a willing admirer. He was ready to admit that she was clever, lively, sensible, and observant. To her disposition he was hitherto a stranger, and he easily allowed himself to think, that she might be deficient in liberality and good nature. Though he had been amused by her remarks, he was inclined to quarrel with her quick perception of the ridiculous, and thought he perceived a greater tendency to satire, than accorded with his *beau ideal* of female propriety.

He might, however, have observed, had he been willing to be otherwise than censorious, that her satire was always light and playful, and that she was ever a willing advocate when an absent person was wantonly assailed. He might also have observed, that even where she had no sufficient grounds for an actual defence, her good nature

would often lead her to attempt, by delicate and well-timed pleasantry, to blunt and divert the sallies of a ridicule which she considered too severe, Lacy, however, was naturally both observant and candid; and whatever were his prepossessions, was not likely to struggle long against conviction. A wet day came opportunely to favour his acquaintance with Miss Morton.

Nothing drives a party at a house in the country more completely to their resources than rain. To kill time soon became an important object, and various were the means devised. Music and billiards had their turn; some went to play at battledore and shuttlecock in the hall; others beguiled the hours in ransacking albums and portfolios. Mr. Tyrwhitt, in despair, proposed *écarté*; and one of his sisters suggested that they should act charades: but these amusements were voted to be better resources for the evening. Some of the ladies worked a little, and some of the gentleman tried to be useful; one helped to unravel silk, and another delivered his opinion upon colours and patterns.

Luncheon came at last, and a great resource it was; for there was change of place and something to do. But the employment of eating was of short duration; and then, after lounging about the rooms of the principal *suite*, they were all at length re-assembled in the long gallery library, which, both in the morning and evening, was the principal place of rendezvous. They soon became variously employed. In the opposite corners of the same sofa sat Lady Appleby making a purse, and Lady Malvern reading a novel. Lord Malvern, the only person who seemed really busy, was writing at a distant table; and his Lordship of Appleby fast asleep with a newspaper on his knee. Mr. Tyrwhitt was teaching a poodle to walk upon his hind legs; Mrs. Poole and Miss Tyrwhitt enlivening themselves with a noisy game at backgammon;

and Hartley sitting near, inventing paragraphs for their amusement, and making cross-readings in the newspaper. Lacy was alternately occupied in talking, reading, drawing caricatures on the back of a letter he had just received, and watching the proceedings of Agnes, who was replacing some broken harp-strings.

More was done than said, till the occupations of most of the party came at once to a conclusion. The noise of the dice and back-gammon men ceased; the novel was laid down; the harp was strung and tuned; and those who were lately so busy, seemed all at once inclined to find their best resource in conversation.

"Who knows any thing of the Norton theatricals?" said Mrs. Poole, first breaking the silence.

"Mr. Lacy, you were last there."

"I have had an account to day," said Lacy.

"The last event was a laughable tragedy—a complete chapter of accidents—Richard's hump slipped under his arm—Lady Anne put him in bodily fear, by her awkward manner of pretending to stab him; and Henry Slingsby, who played Buckingham, threw all into utter confusion, by repeating, not only his part, but his cues."

"Lord!" said Mrs. Poole, "what could they expect when they made that creature act in a tragedy! He has not a serious thought about him. I must say, I like him nevertheless. His laugh is delightful."

"Yes," said Lady Malvern, with a caustic air, which she copied from Lady Rodborough, "it is a pity he ever does any thing else. I allow that he is an incomparable laughier. Nobody is so amusing at a room's length; but you lose the effect if you hear what he says."

"Ah! you are like me," said Miss Tyrwhitt; "I like laughing for laughing sake!"

"I am sure," pursued Lady Malvern, "that in

Slingsby's case, it is better to have his laugh without his nonsense."

"Very good, faith!" said Hartley. "Lady Malvern, I am sure you would approve of my friend Congleton's style of proceeding: when he is going to tell what he thinks a good story, he always has his laugh first;—famous good plan that—it does not interfere with any body else's laugh, and you may get out of the way before the story begins. I know most of Congleton's pet jokes—you have no idea what fun it is to watch his manœuvres to bring them to bear. Nobody lays a train better. Poor Miss Cateaton! it was a shame, really—the other day, under pretence of helping her, he dropped an atlas upon her tender toes, and said that she had had all the world at her feet. I don't think his joke was worth his trouble."

"It was doubly cruel," said Lady Malvern, "to a woman who never had a proposal—which, I am sure I don't wonder at, though Agnes looks as if she did."

"I certainly do," replied Agnes.

"Then I am sure, my dear Agnes," pursued her sister, "you must have a peculiar talent for wondering. What could any body have seen in that plain, prim, old Miss Cateaton?"

"She was young once, and I should think pretty," said Agnes; "and she must always have been good-humoured and pleasing."

"I am glad you don't say 'pleasant.' 'Pleasant' and 'pleasing' are very different—as much as 'amiable' and '*aimable*.' I dare say it is very possible that she may fully deserve the character you give her, but one expects a great deal more in people that pretend to live in the world. Any thing like dowdiness would ruin an angel; if a woman has not fashion, she is quite lost—nothing can save her—the world does not stop to make distinctions."

"Louisa, you are hard upon the poor world," said Agnes, with a smile.

"Oh, I can give you instances," continued Lady Malvern, in the same tone. "Only look at those Lady Hornbys—poor girls! they are pretty, to be sure, though rather in a tame style—and I suppose they may be pleasing. Then they have accomplishments, I am told, though they seldom bring them out with effect. But, after all, they are mere nobodies—they don't get on."

"Or go off, which is more important," said Mrs. Poole.

"No," added Lady Malvern, "and they are never likely—they want fashion—they are not in the first set, nor ever will be. And then, poor creatures! where are they seen? They just creep to Almack's, to help to fill the room on the first two or three nights of the season; and nobody sees them any where afterwards. Then, Lord Bewdley, their father, worthy man! thinks of nothing but drill husbandry, and her ladyship of gardening; and they allow themselves to be always surrounded by a set of hum-drum relations. It is very injurious to the girls, in town especially; and I wonder they suffer it."

"They are certainly very kind to their relations," said Agnes, "and I like them for it; and for their independence. They never struggle and manœuvre for introductions and invitations; they never beg, and flatter, and expose themselves to more trouble, and more humiliation too, than society is really worth. I should say of them, that they liked society for its own sake. They have no ambitious feelings of finery and exclusiveness; they go to see those whom they really like, and not to be seen themselves. It always seems to me that there is much more real dignity in their quiet, unostentations mode of proceeding, than there is in that of many others, who have been always

striving to get on, and think themselves entitled to look down upon them."

"Oh, I agree with you," said Mrs. Poole; "I hate *pushing* people—mere fashion is as bad as no fashion. There are the Penleys—look at them; there is an instance of mere fashion. They are people of neither family nor fortune; they have been living *for* the world, and at the world, and are always studying effect—laying trains for invitations, and angling for acquaintances. As soon as the labours of the town season are over, they set off to the watering places in search of 'Desirables.' The daughters are fine showy girls, but not quite to my taste; they are what my friend, Lady Ashborne, calls 'laboriously elegant'—*so maniérée*—so dressy—always tricked out with such wonderful care in the newest Frenchifications. But gentlemen are the best judges of ladies. What should you say of them, Mr. Lacy?"

"What one might say of most French-women," replied Lacy, "that they look like figures stepping out of the leaves of the 'Journal des Modes.' I hope they would take my remark as a compliment."

"I would not be sure of that," said Hartley. "They have never forgiven me for asking whether they communicate with their Paris milliner by telegraphs or carrier pigeons."

"I think you are all rather severe upon the Miss Penleys," said Agnes. "I won't try to defend them against the shocking imputation of being always too well dressed. I am afraid they are guilty, and, of course, they must bear the dreadful consequences. Perhaps, too, they may seem rather *maniérée*—that I allow—but I don't think they are really affected."

"*Maniérée*, and not affected!" interrupted Lady Malvern. "Nay, Agnes, have some pity for my weak comprehension; I cannot understand

such fine distinctions. Pray, enlighten me. What is the difference?"

"There is almost as much," said Agnes, with a smile, "as you lately made out between 'pleasant' and 'pleasing.'"

"A fair retort," said Lady Malvern, "though not an explanation. But you cannot say that the Penleys are not pushing, manœuvring people. I don't know, otherwise, how you will account for their having got on so well."

"They are agreeable," said Agnes, "and the daughters handsome, and that must account for a great deal."

"Perhaps so," replied Lady Malvern; "but that does not excuse their being such inveterate match-hunters. They are always cruising after a good 'partie;' always thinking of an establishment."

"And never succeeding," said Mrs. Poole.

"And yet," observed Agnes, "they are said to be able manœuvrers, and to make this their principal object. I think their not succeeding ought almost to acquit them."

"Well, Agnes," resumed Lady Malvern, "we won't attack them any longer. But I cannot like them, and never did since I heard them so bepraised by that odious Lady Dartford. By the by, Mrs. Poole, how dreadfully Lady Dartford plays? Did you hear what she lost one evening, about a fortnight ago, at Brighton?"

"My dear Louisa!" exclaimed Agnes, in a tone of expostulation.

"Twelve hundred pounds in the course of an evening," continued Lady Malvern, not attending.

"Nay," said Agnes, "let me give you all the particulars; I am much more circumstantial. Report tells me that the pounds were guineas, and

that she was obliged to leave in pledge her watch, her rings, a fan, and a smelling bottle."

"Foolish girl! Agnes only says this to discredit the story. The fact is, Mrs Poole, that she won't hear any thing against Lady Dartford, though she must know her passion for play."

"Well," replied Agnes, "I believe I must bear witness against her. I have seen her wonderfully eager at cards, even when she was playing for the merest trifle. I particularly remember her once losing two sovereigns at loo, and I assure you that in my opinion she bore her loss extremely ill."

Lacy smiled, and showed, by the look which he directed towards Agnes, that he appreciated her mode of defence. "Miss Morton," said he, a moment afterwards, "you will encourage me to attack your friends for the pleasure of hearing you defend them."

Good nature (in its more enlarged and nobler sense) is so bright an ornament in a youthful female mind—an ornament for the want of which no brilliancy can compensate—that, in as much as Lacy had at first decided that, without this quality, he never could admire Miss Morton, so did he, upon discovering that she really possessed it, begin to like her much better than, three days before, he would have considered possible. This change in his opinion soon betrayed itself in a corresponding change of manner; and, instead of the distant coldness which he at first constrained himself to observe, he now evinced an interest, an attention, which was not unnoticed by Agnes, and could hardly fail to be in some degree flattering.

The following day produced an accession to the party at Huntley, in the person of Lord Midhurst, son of the Earl of Skipton, and his friend Mr. Luscombe. Lacy was acquainted with both, and looked forward to the coming of the former with

some curiosity and interest. It was not that he cared much about him, individually; but his attention had been excited by a circumstance which occurred the day before. Lady Appleby happened to mention that she expected Lord Midhurst, and, as she said this, Lacy observed that Lady Malvern directed a very significant look of satisfaction towards her sister, who, on meeting her eye, smiled, blushed, and turned away. From these short glances it was easy to collect that Lady Malvern believed Lord Midhurst to be an admirer of her sister, of which Agnes seemed not unconscious; and her ladyship's air of pleasure showed that she drew favourable auguries from their approaching interview. Lacy also considered Lord Midhurst to be one who, if matrimonially disposed, and not satisfied with mere flirtation, was not likely to sue in vain. He was good looking and good humoured; a young man of great expectations, lively spirits, frank address, and manners of the world. He was not, however, either clever or well informed; had few pretensions to wit himself, and rarely perceived it in others. Nevertheless, he contrived to fill, very creditably, the character of an "agreeable rattle," and was thought by many to be entertaining. He was quick and vivacious; and, by dint of letting his tongue run unrestrained, sometimes blurted out a good thing. His taste embraced sports of almost every description. Of those which come under the title of accomplishments, dancing alone he liked, from its sociability and gaiety: in music and painting he was a perfect Goth. With books, even of the lightest kind, he had not much acquaintance; indeed, as he said "he had no time for them." He was gay, jovial, light hearted, and thoughtless; had a tolerably correct impression of right and wrong; and, though he possessed not quite the self-denial of an anchorite, could make small sacrifices with a pretty good

grace; and was, when unbiassed by bad example, commendably disposed to do what was right.

Lord Midhurst's companion, Mr. Luscombe, was a gentleman now on the verge of forty; but who, in spite of the visible ravages of tell-tale Time, still endeavoured to affect the stripling, always joined the most youthful group in company, and danced and prattled with very young ladies, with all the zest of one-and-twenty. He was a person very slightly endowed with the advantages either of birth, fortune, talents, or appearance; and who owed his success in society chiefly to his good humour, and to a certain ductility of character which enabled his acquaintance to mould him easily to their will. He was a pattern of utility and compliance: no person served more purposes, or served them with greater willingness. He was always useful to fill a gap in a party, and to help to make things go off well: was set at the end of the table when the lady of the house retired to the side; would either tell a story himself, or be the subject of another's; could make a fourth at whist, when wanted; knew when to press a lady to the instrument; and was invaluable to dance with little misses at their first ball. Above all things, he was an inimitable butt; for he not only patiently received the gibes of his assailants, but invited their attacks by seeming to enjoy them. He understood a joke well; knew both how to laugh, and to listen; and had sufficient tact to abstain from wearying any one with his own discourse. He did a little of every thing tolerably ill, and was consequently a useful foil upon most occasions. The awkward squad of a shooting party would generally make bold to bet that they would kill more game than Luscombe; and bad indeed must be the billiard player, whom he did not put in good spirits. In short he was one of those passive persons, who seem to fill in modern society a similar situation to that, which was

formerly borne by the court fool in the establishments of feudal princes.

Of these two new visitors, Lord Midhurst excited the greatest share of Lacy's attention, from the ardent admiration, which he instantly displayed for Agnes Morton. Lacy had now an opportunity of seeing that lady in a new light, and in so doing, he felt an interest, which, on consideration, startled and surprised him; and he wondered at his own curiosity in watching the progress of a flirtation, in which he was so little concerned.

Agnes received the very evident homage of her admirer, with great ease and composure, and laughed and talked with perfect willingness, but with that unconcern that evinced no thought either of attracting or repelling. Lacy would have approved of her manner, if he could have thought it natural: but this he would not allow, and viewed it only as the result of practice and design. He became angry with Agnes, for showing herself so finished a coquette, little suspecting that nothing but a slight degree of jealousy in his own breast, could ever have suggested such an idea. He also began to augur ill of her taste and understanding, in being so much entertained with such a mere chatterer as Lord Midhurst.

Love, which unseals the lips of all, had made his lordship more than usually voluble. "It was very cruel in you," said he, "to leave town so terribly early. It grew so stupid after you went!"

"Then I seem to have left it at the right time," said Agnes.

"No, faith! you must not say that, for it was not stupid to every body—only to me. Upon my honour, when you were gone, I grew so dull and melancholy, that if you had seen me, you would not have known me. They used to quiz me dreadfully. A friend of mine came up to me in the

Park, and asked me on what day I meant to shoot myself."

"How very severe!" said Agnes, laughing. "Do tell me your friend's name, that I may know whom I ought to be afraid of."

"Nay, that is too good, upon my honour," said Lord Midhurst: "he ought to be afraid of you. You know *you* can be very severe. You ladies always beat us men in *that*. But I like people to be severe. I wish you had stayed in town, to have been at the Wharton's *déjeûné*. You never saw such a wo-begone business. It rained all day, as if it had never rained before. Half the people looked so hazy! as if the fog had got into their faces. It was altogether capital fun; I never enjoyed myself more. Then, afterwards, we had a fancy ball—uncommonly good that was too. What character do you think I went in?"

"A sombre one, I hope; for it would have been extremely painful to affect a cheerfulness that you did not feel."

"Ah! now, really that is too bad—cruel, faith, to remind a man of his misfortunes; for all that time, I was the most miserable dog on the face of the earth, seriously, without joking."

"Without joking! That I conclude. Miserable people seldom joke."

Much more passed in the same strain, Lord Midhurst talking on, with heedless, blundering vivacity, and Agnes playfully unravelling his inconsistencies.

Lacy, though amused, was not altogether satisfied. He thought that Agnes appeared to take a greater pleasure in the conversation and attentions of her admirer, than was quite consistent with what, he knew, must be her real estimate of his understanding. He thought her vanity was flattered by his homage, and that she was pleased with an op-

portunity of displaying her conquest. In conversation with Lord Midhurst, she also seemed to exhibit a careless familiarity with the scenes and characters of fashionable life, which Lacy thought less real than affected; and which seemed to hold out claims to importance, which he was rather disposed to deride.

“It is truly a pity,” said he to himself, “that one of such beauty, elegance, and talent, is so little sensible of the ridicule to which she exposes herself, by this vulgar aspiration, after a station and consequence, which her extraction must deny her.”

These reflections recalled, in some degree, his first feeling of dislike; and, unconscious of any undue arrogance in himself, he began to wish that such false pride might have a fall, and even took an uncharitable pleasure in the prospect of Miss Morton’s receiving some signal mortification.

CHAPTER VI.

Une froideur, ou une incivilité, que vient de ceux qui sont au dessus de nous, nous les fait hair; mais un salut ou un sourire nous les reconcilie.

BRUYERE.

HITHERTO we have heard nothing of Lord Appleby. At this, however, let nobody be surprised, for he was not a person much calculated to attract attention any where, though decidedly more conspicuous in his own house than in any other. He was inoffensive, mild, and amiable. His chief merit in society was that of being a perfect gentleman: his countervailing demerits, vanity and dullness. His conversation was languid and common place; and its only approach to piquancy, consisted in a querulous tone of sickly fastidiousness. His vanity was of a harmless kind, which few refused to humour, and was chiefly displayed in an over-weening admiration of every thing that belonged to himself. His place, house, books, pictures, whatever he had, was infinitely better than any body else could possibly possess; while, at the same time, he disclaimed receiving from them any positive pleasure, and always lamented the trouble and vexation which they entailed upon him.

On the following morning, Lacy was indulging him with a few civil comments upon the beauties of Huntley, and complimenting him upon his liberality, in throwing it open to the inspection of the curious.

“Mr. Lacy,” said his lordship, inwardly delighted with the subject, but looking the picture of misery and disgust; “never have a show house. I assure you, having tried it, that the plague, and the nuisance, and the annoyance, and the trouble, are something perfectly inconceivable. Day after day, people come, and they are admitted; and in they walk, and away they ramble through your rooms, and go where you will, there you meet them. As I say, for the time being, you are not master of your own house; your house, as I say, is not your own: you are not master of your own house. It is indeed a serious drawback from the trifling satisfaction of having things that are considered worth seeing.”

Lacy assented; but said that it must be very gratifying to think that he had the means of giving so much pleasure, and, perhaps, of improving the taste of his visiters.

“Ah, yes—very true—it ought to be gratifying, of course; though I must honestly confess that I do it rather as a duty than as any source of gratification. I have tried to remedy the evil by restricting admission to certain days—but all in vain; it would not do—the throng of applicants was too great. “You see,” he observed pointing out two carriages which appeared in a distant part of the approach, “a case in point—see how we are pestered. I shall just have time before they arrive to show you the picture I was mentioning,” and so saying, taking Lacy by the arm, he led him into another room.

Meanwhile the carriages approached, and at length drew up before the door. The first was a substantial travelling coach, which was closely followed by a hack chaise. Both belonged to the same party, which, on being landed from their vehicles, appeared to consist of a stout middle aged gentleman, and his plump wife, three slim young

ladies, and a tall slip of a boy. Their motions were observed from the window of the room which Lacy and Lord Appleby had just quitted, and in which remained only Lady Malvern and her sister, of whom the former, hearing that they were not visitors of the family, and judging them vulgar from the air of their equipage, thought she might safely indulge in the pleasure of a stare.

“What beings!” she exclaimed, as she watched them getting out of their carriage. “Agnes, do come and look at them—those tawdry girls! and the old people—quite as good—staring about them, I declare, as if they had never seen such a house before; and now he looks this way—good heavens! it is—no—yes, it certainly is——”

“Who?” said Agnes, approaching the window.

“Look!” said Lady Malvern, in a tone of alarm.

“Yes,” replied Agnes, “there is no mistaking them. I see they are our cousins, the Bagshawes.”

“Hush!” said her ladyship; “come away, Agnes,” and she looked suspiciously round the room to see if any one was near. “Take no notice,” she added, in a low tone.

Agnes looked at her with surprise. “I think I hardly understand you. Do you mean that I should take notice of *them*?”

“Yes, to be sure I did—why need you?—Surely you don’t intend to go out and see them?”

“I do indeed.”

“Then, Agnes, you will disoblige me,” said Lady Malvern, walking away from her rather proudly.

“I should be sorry to do that,” replied Agnes; “but I hope, Louisa, it will not be so; for I think you must acknowledge the propriety of paying some attention to such near relations.”

“They are not such *very* near relations; besides, it is their being related that makes the difficulty.

You know what beings they are—one can never acknowledge them to the Applebys, and Lord Midhurst, and all that party.”

“I have no scruples on that point,” replied Agnes, calmly. “Besides, Louisa, you should remember that we are under obligations to them, which I could never forgive myself for neglecting to repay. You know how kind they were some time ago, before your marriage, when you all had the scarlet fever. *You* received particular attention; I am sure you would not be ungrateful.”

A self-reproving blush came over Lady Malvern’s countenance.

“Oh, I am sure I am quite sensible that what they did was very kind, and I shall always say so. But what good can we do by going out to see them now? *That* would be a very poor return.”

“I allow that it would. We should do them no real good, it is true, but we should give them pleasure, at any rate.”

“I don’t know that. I dare say they had rather look over the house at their ease, without being put out of the way by us. You know they are all in their travelling dishabille: our presence would only distress them. Besides, if we keep quiet they will never know that we were here.”

“I am not sure of that,” said Agnes; “I think they saw us. But, whether they did or not, I should equally reproach myself for having treated them unkindly.”

“See them, by all means,” said Lady Malvern; “but do not draw me into seeing them too; one of the family surely is enough.”

“No,” said Agnes; “if I see them, you must; or else the neglect on your side will undo all the pleasure arising from any civility that I can show. There is no use in hanging back: the relationship must be known. I feel their vulgarity as strongly as you can, but I know that they are worthy peo-

ple; and, as for their manners, we must take them as we find them;" and, so saying, putting her arm within her sister's, she walked with her out of the room.

Mrs. Bagshawe was the first cousin of Mr. Morton, being the daughter of his father's elder brother, who, as he had risen less in affluence, had not been enabled to give equal refinement to his descendants. Mrs. Bagshawe was a good-hearted, but ignorant and vulgar woman, and had now been for many years the wife of a respectable London attorney, who, without much ability, had, by dint of industry, and a character for punctuality and integrity, amassed a comfortable fortune. In fact, he felt himself sufficiently wealthy to take frequent relaxations from his professional labours, and to indulge himself and family with a little pleasure-hunting in the summer. Such was their present object. They had been at Cheltenham, and were going to the Lakes, and stopped in their way to view the beauties of Huntley Park. They had got into the first room of the show suite, had obtained catalogues and an attendant, and had asked a few questions, when a door was opened, and in walked Lady Malvern and Miss Morton. There was much real surprise on the part of the Bagshawes, which was answered by a little well affected astonishment from Lady Malvern, who chose to prevent her attention from being too overpowering, by pretending to stumble upon them unawares. The office, therefore, of setting both parties more at their ease, seemed to devolve upon Agnes, who greeted them all with much cordiality. Lady Malvern stiffly bent her head, coldly said that she was glad to meet them, and made languid inquiries respecting their healths and arrangements. The Bagshawes, at first, could think of nothing but the happy chance which brought them together.

"So strange and so lucky as it is, to be sure,

said Mrs. Bagshawe, "that we and your ladyship should just be coming to look at this place at the same time! It is odd we didn't meet on the road."

Lady Malvern informed her, with a smile of superiority, that they were staying there on a visit.

"Indeed! I am sure I ask your pardon," said Mrs. Bagshawe, with rather a puzzled look of astonishment, as if she now comprehended, for the first time, that show houses were made to be lived in. A pause ensued; and Mr. Bagshawe, a fat, prim, civil looking man, with a ludicrous assumption of courtliness in his manner, smirked, threw his short body into various contortions, and with a little impressive shake of the head, politely hoped the Viscount was well.

"If you mean Lord Malvern," said her ladyship, "he is very well. He is here too."

"And the Earl and Countess of Rodborough," pursued Mr. Bagshawe, who was determined to do the "civil thing," effectually: "they, I trust are also enjoying that health which all must wish them. I hope the Earl has not suffered from his long and strict attention to the duties of the House of Lords?"

Lady Malvern bowed her head, and murmured something not very intelligible.

"It must be a great satisfaction to his lordship," Mr. Bagshawe proceeded, "after having ably fulfilled his senatorial duties, to revisit once more his native wilds, if I may be allowed the expression, in alluding to his splendid seat at Westcourt. How delightful to find himself in that dignified retirement, that happy union of ease and grandeur which, I must confess, is most truly enviable."

Here Mr. Bagshawe suddenly stopped; not for lack of words, for he was prepared to have spun out the sentence to double its length; or of inclination, for he thought himself a fine talker, and,

like most persons of that persuasion, loved to hear himself speak; but he was arrested by the abrupt leave which Lady Malvern took of them, while, as she walked away, Lord Appleby made his appearance at another door.

Agnes was hurt at the uncivil suddenness of her sister's departure, and resolved to repair it by staying with the Bagshawes, and undergoing the penance of accompanying them through the rooms. The unpleasantness of her situation was increased by the sudden entrance of Lord Appleby, who, finding himself in the same room, and seeing that they were friends of hers, advanced towards them with the civil intention of paying his personal respects, at the same time looking at Agnes in a way that showed his expectation that she would perform the ceremony of an introduction. This was accordingly done, and Agnes then hoped that, after a few bows, and a few more words on either side, the conference would be ended.

But Mr. Bagshawe, pleased with such a dignified accession to his acquaintance, and anxious to acquit himself of a flourishing eulogium, which lay ready on his tongue's end, after a prefatory hem, and a glance round the room, addressed his lordship in a style which foreboded any thing rather than a brief interview.

"Your walls, my lord," said he, waving his hand, "are well filled with food for the eye of taste. I must confess I was not prepared for such a banquet as your lordship spreads before your visitors. I was told that I should be dazzled; but my expectations are quite exceeded, and I hope I may be allowed to congratulate your lordship on the possession of this noble, indeed I may say, this peerless collection."

The beautiful appropriateness of this speech was, in a great measure, lost upon Lord Appleby: but without reflecting that his eulogist had not yet

seen more than a small and inferior part of the collection which he so warmly commended, he perceived that praise and admiration were the objects of his address, and with these, however administered, he was always disposed to be satisfied. He had a keen perception of vulgarity, and a pride which usually shrunk from the contamination of its approach: but his pride was less active than his vanity; and in order to gratify the latter with flattery, even of so broad and clumsy a description, he condescended, from pure good-nature, as he thought, to prolong his civilities to the Bagshawes. He smiled, frowned, shrugged his shoulders, raised his eyebrows, allowed that he had some good things, and then, affecting an air of fastidious indifference, vouchsafed to point out some of the objects which were most worthy of their attention.

"There is a picture," said he, pointing to a small Correggio, "which I am not sorry to have got. I imported it myself. No one knows," he added, shaking his head, with a piteous look, "no one knows the trouble, and the money, and what not, which that small picture cost me—not more than I thought it was worth; but more I verily believe, than any other picture I have."

"Only think! such a small one as it is!" exclaimed Mrs. Bagshawe, measuring it with her eye, and looking from it with surprise, to a gigantic Sneyders which hung above.

"Quite a gem!" said Mr. Bagshawe, who had gathered from the lips of Christie and Phillips, a few choice specimens of the phraseology of the auction room. "A very capital bit of the master, and in a remarkable fine condition. Your lordship deserves the thanks of the country for securing us such a treasure. Correggio is very scarce, my lord; we don't see him every day. In good preservation he is invaluable. Money can hardly buy him pure."

Lord Appleby made a grave inclination of assent, his better taste beginning to take a slight alarm at the professional tone of his visiter's remarks, and he directed his attention somewhat impatiently to another picture.

"Uncommon fine, indeed, my lord!" exclaimed Mr. Bagshawe. "The air of the head is beautiful—so flowing!—so—and then, what a depth! What a—look at it, my dear. Mrs. B., my lord, is fond of the arts as well as I. We have all our little turn that way. Only look at it, my dear; see what a breadth there is about it! I never saw such a breadth in my life!"

"It is not so broad as the picture next to it," said the lady, very innocently, and in an undertone, as if to correct her husband's mistake. Lord Appleby heard the remark, and the well-bred corners of his mouth, exhibited, for a moment, the least possible disposition to smile. Mr. Bagshawe frowned at his wife, and fidgetted across the room. "Ha!" said he, glad to change the subject, "an old acquaintance, I perceive. I saw the original of this at Milan. It is really a very perfect copy."

A cloud passed over Lord Appleby's brow at mention of the word "copy," and he felt as only a collector can feel.

"I never hang up copies," he replied, suppressing with a laudable effort, his generous glow of indignation. "This is a *duplicate*, if you will; but equally original with the picture at Milan. Oh, you shall be convinced, Sir," said he, to the humbled and apologizing Mr. Bagshawe, who was backing out of the scrape, with all the cumbrous dexterity of a well-trained dray-horse, "you shall be convinced: you shall take nothing on my bare assertion. I will show you a remarkable variation, that, in my humble opinion, is quite conclusive. Look at the right foot of the left hand figure; on that foot are six toes. Now, Sir, I ask you, as a

judge of painting, would a servile copyist have done that? would any but the easy, negligent hand of the master? Impossible, every way impossible. That sixth toe decides the question."

Mr. Bagshawe hastened to repair his error by promptly assenting to his lordship's remark, and assured him, that the sixth toe was a hundred pounds in the picture's way in any auction room in London. But Lord Appleby, although appeased, had, by this time, seen quite enough of the party; for though he could have borne with the technical admiration of Mr. Bagshawe, he was greatly disgusted with the rest of the family. Poor Mrs. Bagshawe he set down for an ignoramus: the girls had giggled too much at the toe, and had been shamefully inattentive to all the higher objects of curiosity. As for the son, a gawky, semi-dandified youth, in the debateable age between boyhood and manhood, who seemed thoroughly *géné* with his padded coat and stiff cravat, and who, to the discomfiture of his lordship's nervous system, had kept up an incessant tattoo with a small switch upon the side of his boot; his only audible remark that had any reference to the pictures, was once, when, after cocking his eye at a large hunting piece by Sneyders, he observed to one of his sisters, that the hindermost dog had a "cross of the bull."

This remark contributed, among other things, to accelerate the departure of his lordship, who was seriously wounded by any thing that attacked the credit of his pictures; who had too much politeness to vent his contempt, and too much pride to stoop to correct the misconceptions of the junior branches of this hopeful family. He, therefore, with a gracious inclination of the head, and a circling look that wandered from the Bagshawes to Agnes, hoped that her friends would receive every gratification which his collection could afford, and to her great relief withdrew.

Scarcely was the door closed, when the Bagshawes began their comments upon Lord Appleby. Mrs. Bagshawe said he was an elegant man and had not an ounce of pride about him. Miss Bagshawe remarked, with much discrimination, that though he was not much of a beau now, he looked as if he had been one; while her sisters evinced much surprise that a lord who lived in such a fine house should wear such a shabby watch-ribbon. Dick, the son, made no remark; but his father supplied his deficiencies by entering at large into the character of Lord Appleby.

"I am extremely well satisfied with his lordship," said he. "He is a truly agreeable man, Miss Morton, and a gentlemanly man, and a sensible man, and a man of a fine mind. I feel to understand his character as well as if I had known him all my life. A little blind—allow me to say it—a little blind on a certain subject," looking significantly at the pictures; "for, between ourselves," speaking almost in a whisper, though there was no one near by whom he feared to be overheard; "between ourselves, there is a great deal of rubbish in this collection, things for which I would not give *that*," with a contemptuous snap of the fingers; "far from genuine, I assure you, though here and there is a pretty bit. I hope," he added, with a complacent smile at the recollection of his own address, "you did not think that I went too far in humouring his lordship's foible? I saw he liked a little praise, which I was careful to administer. This was one of those cases, Miss Morton, when it is allowable to scatter dust in a great man's eyes."

Agnes smiled, partly at the awkward vanity of her relation, who flattered himself that he had played the courtier with success, and partly through amusement at hearing Lord Appleby seriously called a great man. She felt acutely the vulgarity of

her relations, and saw all the ridicule that their awkwardness and pretension must excite in any of the well-bred inmates of the house, no others of whom she devoutly hoped might cross their path. Above all she dreaded lest they should encounter the eye of Lacy; for whose opinion she had already begun to conceive much respect, and among whose qualities she observed a great quickness to the detection of absurdities. She felt much uneasiness in the anticipation of his meeting them, as she contemplated the groupe before her. There was squab, puffy Mr. Bagshawe, with his perked-up head, and an important strut; his dowdy wife, whom a rich pelisse strove in vain to render lady-like, with her hot, homely face, and dusty bonnet; the priggish apprentice-like cub of a son; the three girls in ill-chosen finery, soiled by the journey, the two youngest minutely inspecting the furniture, while the eldest affected a languid air of sovereign disregard for every thing around her.

While engaged in this review, Agnes heard approaching footsteps in the next room, and thought, with horror, that they were those of Lacy. Her worst apprehensions were verified; for in another instant he appeared. The room they were in, was a passage room, which he was obliged to traverse in order to join his party at the other side of the house; and she consoled herself with thinking that there was no probability that he would do more than walk hastily through it. She perceived, however, that his eye, on entering, rapidly surveyed the groupe with that air of satisfaction, with which an adept at quizzing always seizes a good subject; and this caused her no slight uneasiness. It was, indeed, a critical moment. Mrs. Bagshawe was extracting from her pocket a collection of biscuits wrapped up in whitey-brown paper: the second girl was measuring with her fingers, the breadth of the lace on the window curtain; while the young-

est was peeping at a handsome footstool under the sofa. The son, stationed opposite a pier glass, had just perceived, to his infinite horror, that by incautiously fingering his cravat, he had left imprinted on it in many a dusty stain, the marks of his new yellow gloves; and Mr. Bagshawe, with one eye shut, and a roll of paper applied to the other, was examining a picture, and walking backwards to try the effect at different distances.

It was at this moment that Lacy, after a short look of astonishment at finding Agnes with such a party, attempted to pass behind Mr. Bagshawe. The space was small, the obstructions of furniture numerous as usual, Lacy's attention much divided, and our unsuspecting connoisseur, absorbed in the contemplation of higher objects, steadily continuing his retrograde course. The consequence was that few steps were taken, on either side, before the parties came into contact. Straightway each started back, and a thousand pardons were begged in an instant. Exclamations, and somewhat of a giggle, escaped from Mrs. and the Misses Bagshawe. Agnes could not restrain a smile, though rather uneasy at the addition of any circumstance which could help to swell Lacy's budget of ridicule.

But slight, indeed, was her horror *then*, compared with that which she experienced a moment after, when each gentleman, on recovering from his surprise, exchanged a look of recognition: "Mr. Bagshawe, I believe," and "Ha! Mr. Lacy," escaped severally from their lips, and before another second could elapse, they had actually shaken hands.

Conversation now became unavoidable. It commenced with inquiries from Mr. Bagshawe respecting the circumstances of their rencontre, and exclamations of surprise at his good fortune, in meeting at once so many friends.

"So many friends!" repeated Lacy to himself, and stole an inquiring glance at Agnes, who was then talking to Miss Bagshawe, and did not notice his appealing look.

"Mrs. B., Mr. Lacy, my dear, that was so civil to me abroad," said Mr. Bagshawe to his wife, rushing, with bustling eagerness, into the business of introduction. "Mr. Lacy, Mrs. Bagshawe; our junior branches," pointing to his family, "my daughters; my son Richard, our eldest hope—all come to view the house. You met me last, Sir, on a foreign tour, you now meet me on a home tour—a curious coincidence. The fact is, we have been at Cheltenham and are now on our way to the Lakes. It is our usual practice, Mr. Lacy, to go somewhere every year."

Here Mrs. Bagshawe chimed in with a declaration that a little *outing* did them all a world of good.

"Yes, pursued her husband, eagerly translating her simple meaning into his more ostentatious phraseology; "we derive much benefit from our excursions, benefit both to our minds and bodies, as I sometimes observe to Mrs. B. Depend upon it there is nothing like travelling. Was not it Dr. Johnson, Sir, who said there was no pleasure in life like moving rapidly in a post-chaise?"

Lacy assented.

"*We* came in our own carriage," said Mrs. Bagshawe, who feared lest any misconception should arise from her husband's quotation in praise of an humbler mode of conveyance.

"True, my dear, so we did. A noble mansion, this, Mr. Lacy, and worthy of a noble owner. I have just been talking to his lordship. His lordship did us the honour to pass through and point out one or two of the pictures that were most worthy of our attention." He then proceeded to en-

large upon the subject of Lord Appleby, his house, and his collection, repeating by the way many of the remarks which he had previously made to Agnes.

Much of this desertation was, however, lost upon Lacy, whose thoughts had been otherwise diverted by hearing the word "cousin" applied to Agnes by Miss Bagshawe, and from that moment he had been attentive to the conversation of the two young ladies. Knowing the humble origin of the Mortons, it caused in him no great surprise to find that Agnes was related to vulgar people; yet still the contrast between their inelegance and her refinement was such as to create a momentary shock. He felt also some curiosity to see how she would conduct herself under circumstances so humiliating.

During the conversation between Lacy and Mr. Bagshawe, Agnes had endeavoured to point out to her cousins those objects which she thought most likely to amuse them. Miss Bagshawe, with a silly, half-bred affectation, sometimes seeming to assume an air of superior taste, sometimes disclaiming all pretensions to any, disdained to be amused with any thing she saw around her, and tried to establish her pretensions to vivacity and worldly knowledge, by detailing some watering-place tittle-tattle, and chattering about balls and concerts. Her manner had become more affected since the appearance of Lacy, whose favourable notice she could not help wishing to attract. She was good looking, and might have been even admired if she could have let herself alone, and not, by dint of striving to be over mannerly, spoiled the effect of all that nature had done in her behalf. She tossed her head, rolled her eyes, giggled laboriously at nothing, and could not walk across the room without such multifarious contortions! such glidings, and sinkings, and sail-

ings, and divings! all which Lacy's quick eye had unsparingly observed, and his suppressed smile of ridicule was, to Agnes, sufficiently intelligible.

Had the object been an indifferent person, she might have been equally amused; but in the present instance she felt distressed for her cousin, who was quite incapable of perceiving the ridicule to which she exposed herself.

All the shame which Agnes felt for Miss Bagshawe, and still more, did this young lady feel for the childish manners and simple curiosity of her younger sisters, who, being perfectly natural, conveyed no similar impression to the minds of Agnes or of Lacy. Vulgar minds are often most accessible to the feelings of false shame, and Miss Bagshawe was constantly in agonies at the hoydenish *naïveté* of Misses Lucy and Arabella, who, unrestrained by the presence of Lacy, chattered unservedly, and attacked Agnes with frequent questions, as, how old Lady Appleby was? how much the Miss Tyrwhitts spent in dress? whether they lived all the year upon venison? and whether the carpet upon which they were then walking was a Turkey one?

"What *can* it signify," said Miss Bagshawe, in a reproving tone; then, turning to Agnes, "I assure you, cousin, I am not at all curious about the Applebys. They tell me," lowering her voice, "that Mr. T., the heir, is not by any means agreeable, at least that was what I heard at Cheltenham. Apropos, of *that* I ought to tell you that we have been very gay there. It really is the sweetest place! I am sure if you had been there you would rave about it. There is such an immense deal of visiting! and *that* you like, I know you do; I am sure you are rather a rake at heart. We had assemblies every week; and the country about it is all so lovely; we used to take such charming *rides* in our open carriage."

"It is a barouche landau," said Miss Lucy.

"Well, child, I am not a coachmaker, nor my cousin either. Do learn to express yourself properly. Such charming rides we used to take! Oh, and we saw so many people that we knew! Yes, and we heard of you too," said she, looking significantly; "there were many pressing inquiries made after you, I assure you, by a certain gentleman that shall be nameless."

"Poor gentleman," said Agnes, "why must he be nameless?"

"La, cousin! how can you?" said Miss Bagshawe, surprised at her composure, and disappointed in the expectation of rallying her into a silly display of coquettish embarrassment. "I am sure you must know whom I mean, a very old flirt of yours."

"Very old is he? I am sure I don't know, but I am prepared to feel a great respect for him."

"Nay, but he is a young man."

"Oh, I beg his pardon: a young man but an old flirt."

"Now are not you dying to know his name?" pursued Miss Bagshawe, vexed at having her intimation so calmly received. "I am sure you must be curious."

"I shall not object to your telling me."

"Well, then," whispering, "Major Chatterley."

"Oh! Major Chatterley," repeated Agnes, aloud, without exhibiting more emotion at the explosion of this secret, than if a four-legged puppy had been the subject of their conversation.

Nevertheless she was much annoyed at her cousin's ill-bred tone of raillery, and the more so, as she was conscious that every syllable was heard by Lacy. She had, however, too much native dignity of feeling to allow herself to be disconcerted, and too much firm command of temper, to manifest, by word or look, the mingled feelings of vexation

which she experienced during the visit. Her annoyance had been greatest, and she had to struggle most earnestly against the suggestions of wounded pride, during the period of Lacy's presence. She had already witnessed instances of the quickness with which he seized a subject for ridicule, and at the same time the ancient grudge between their houses had perhaps rendered her fearful of lowering her dignity in his eyes. Besides she knew his aristocratic prejudices, and probably contempt of her low connexions; and added to all this was a growing solicitude for his good opinion, which could not perhaps be traced to any of the above-mentioned causes, and of which she became conscious for the first time.

Little, however, need she have feared lest her association with the Bagshawes should have lowered her in the estimation of Lacy. On the contrary, it had dispelled many of the impressions which he had allowed himself to entertain. He had thought her a deceptive being, tricked out in forced refinement, which not being of natural growth, would fade away under the influence of untoward situation. He had now seen her undergo an ordeal quite as severe as his harshest wishes could have anticipated, and she had risen superior from the trial. Her unpretending frankness and kindness of manner, towards beings whom she must secretly despise, her cheerful endeavour to accommodate herself to their uncongenial natures, her unconscious superiority, displayed in spite of herself, in every word and gesture, all struck Lacy very forcibly; and when he considered the contrast between the affected graces of Miss Bagshawe, and the unstudied elegance of Agnes, he was hurt to think that he should have been led by prejudice to imagine, for an instant, that one particle of vulgarity could have existed in such a being. His eyes were suddenly opened; a mist had been dispelled, and he

found that he leaped at once from prejudice to admiration.

Meanwhile, the Bagshawes were departing: but the trials of Agnes were not yet ended, though their greatest bitterness had ceased when Lacy quitted their party. It seemed as if the Bagshawes were destined to pass in review before every person whom that house contained; for, in the entrance-hall, as if purposely to witness their ceremonious leave-taking, were Lord Midhurst, Mr. Luscombe, and one or two others. Agnes also had to answer several loud inquiries from her cousins, respecting the names of these gentlemen, which she doubted not they must have heard. Then followed a debate, carried on in a sonorous whisper, which hissed most audibly through the hall, about the extent of the *douceur* which it would be proper to give to the attendant, and upon which important point, Agnes was entreated to decide. Then burst forth a loud rude giggle from the Misses Bagshawe and Master Richard, on detecting "Pa," who was inadvertently carrying off, in his pocket, a catalogue of the pictures, which he was civilly informed by the servant in waiting, he was not allowed to take out of the house.

At last they got to their carriage, and after much time consumed in arranging baskets of provisions, and settling who should sit backwards, to the great relief of Agnes, they kissed their hands to her, and departed.

CHAPTER VII.

Perfections meeting in divers persons cannot choose but find one another, and delight in that they find ; for likeness of manners is likely in season to draw liking with affection.

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

ALL the party assembled at Huntley had tact enough to understand that relations so little refined as the Bagshawes, would not afford an agreeable topic either to Lady Malvern or Miss Morton, and they therefore prudently abstained from any further mention of them. This consideration sealed the lips of Lacy, though he longed to hear what Agnes would say of them; and he was agreeably surprised when, without any appearance of restraint, she voluntarily introduced the subject.

"I hope," said she, "you will not think me too inquisitive, if I ask how you became acquainted with my relation, Mr. Bagshawe. He mentioned something of services rendered him by you abroad."

"They were scarcely worth recalling," replied Lacy. "Last year I met him at Milan. He had lost his way, and could not muster sufficient Italian to ask it; and I assisted him to the extent of my local knowledge, for which he was extremely grateful. He seems a good humoured, well meaning man. I had no idea that he was related to your family."

"Very likely," replied Agnes; "but I suppose the discovery has not caused you much surprise."

You know we can lay no claim to high descent. Our family tree is but a sapling."

"If the fruit of a tree is good, we should not regard its age," said Lacy.

Agnes acknowledged with a smile, and slight inclination of the head, the complimentary tone of the observation, and added, "You are perhaps aware that we owe our rise to industry, and we have, therefore, no right to set up airs of superiority over those of our connexions, who have been only less early in profiting by the same advantages. Aristocratic feelings of hauteur, even if they are ever perfectly commendable, are certainly misplaced in those who have so little claim to them."

Lacy made no reply to this observation, and thought it better to recur to what she had said previously.

"You said," pursued he, "that I could not have been surprised at the discovery of your relationship. Why will you do yourself such an injustice? In fact I was very much surprised at finding you in the midst of such a groupe. I do not mean to undervalue them. I can easily believe that they are very estimable people; but they belong to a class of society which must be totally unsuited to your habits. You can have nothing in common with them."

"To be honest," said she, "there are circumstances under which I feel very strongly the awkwardness of the association; but this is only when they are taken out of the sphere which best suits them. Place me with them in their domestic circle, where every thing was natural and unconstrained, and, as a painter would say, 'in keeping,' and I could enter easily, and with interest into all they thought, and did, and said; nay, I could take a pleasure in their company. Don't suppose that any part of the pleasure would consist in laughing at them: *that* would be uncharitable; and, besides, I

could not laugh at them *there*. People are seldom ridiculous, unless when taken out of their proper station, or when their vanity makes them strive to appear what they are not."

"And is this the case with any of the party we saw this morning?"

"It is rather malicious in you to ask me a question that I am sure you can so well answer yourself. Yes, I cannot acquit them all. Mr. Bagshawe rather too much affects *virtù*, and a pretty mode of expressing himself; but in other respects, when there is no immediate call for display, is a well judging, right hearted man. The eldest daughter is a little *maniéré*—at least before company, though a quiet, good girl at home. In fact, she has seen just enough of society to spoil her a little, and not enough to do her good. As to the rest of the family, I never feel much disposed to smile at *them*; they are so perfectly natural; they show you so plainly what they are, and seem to have no wish to pass for any thing more. To be sure I am sometimes a little amused with Mrs. Bagshawe's misconceptions, but she would never be guilty of them, if she was not taken out of her element. People to be thoroughly ridiculous must be either affected or misplaced. If I could by possibility meet my relations, the Bagshawes, at Almack's, I dare say I should feel ashamed of them, though nevertheless I should be angry at myself for such a feeling. It is a very unamiable species of false shame."

Lacy assented to her opinion, and regarded her with a look of admiration. He was thinking how vain was the fear that any association with vulgarity should attach ridicule to her. Agnes herself did not observe his look, and seemed, for an instant, absorbed in thought.

"You will think," continued she, after a short pause, with a faint smile, and colouring slightly, "that I have been talking in a strange blunt man-

ner about my relations. I know no subject upon which people in general are more reserved. I promise you, Mr. Lacy, that if you had not known something of them previously, I would not have lectured upon them to you so freely as I have done; but I——” she stopped. She was going to add what she felt would have been too flattering to Lacy, and would have looked too much like encouragement. Lacy, however, would not allow the pleasing assurance to be lost.

“I flatter myself,” said he, “you hoped that I should not abuse your confidence.”

“Of course, I *hoped* so,” she answered, with a slight blush.

“And won’t you say you thought so?” he added, in a tone of more tender expostulation than he had ever used to her before.

“Why, really,” replied she, with a laugh which had in it somewhat of effort, “I can hardly say less after having known you so long—though, I am forgetting myself, when I say I hope you will not abuse my *confidence*, for I have said nothing you may not repeat—nothing you need remember to forget—not even the shadow of a secret. I was only going to apologize for troubling you with this long discussion upon family subjects in such a chattering fit of unreserve.”

“Pray don’t apologize,” replied Lacy; “you don’t know how much I am obliged to you for it.”

He paused awhile, and then added: “I am afraid you think that I am a lover of reserve—that I am one who can take no interest in the concerns of any of his neighbours. We mix little with them, it is true, but it does not necessarily follow, that this should proceed from a morose disposition, or from any want of kindly feeling.”

“No,” replied Agnes, “such an inference might be very unjust—though, at the same time, I dare say you will allow that it would not be improbable.”

“Of that, I am aware,” said Lacy; “and I am therefore the more anxious to avoid its consequences—one is not secure from censure by living to one’s self—sins of omission are punished quite as severely as any others.”

Agnes made no reply. The conversation was taking a course which it became difficult to follow; besides, she was sensible that if there had been faults of omission on the part of the Lacys, there had been a corresponding want of neighbourly kindness in her own family; and as she could not confess to Lacy the extent of their prejudices against him, his candour could not safely be imitated.

Both were silent for a short time. Lacy looked down, while Agnes watched his countenance, as if expecting what was to follow. That countenance underwent frequent changes, and was sometimes grave, then brightened for an instant, bearing, at the same time, an air of perplexity, as if thoughts were passing across his mind which he feared, and yet longed to express. At length, however, he looked up, and assuming a gay and careless manner, as if to conceal the seriousness of his meditations, added, with a laugh,—

“I was thinking, Miss Morton, how singular it is that, living as we do in the same neighbourhood, we should have been such perfect strangers till within these few last days—even luck seems to have been against me—in the country, particularly, it has so happened, that on no public occasions have we ever met.”

“Certainly, chance has generally been against us: but you must remember, at the same time, that my public life has not been a very long one; and during half of that time, you, I believe, have been abroad. You were in Italy six months ago?”

“I was,” said he, his countenance brightening; “but how came you to know that? for I am not so

notorious a personage as to expect to find strangers perfectly acquainted with my petty proceedings."

"Perhaps you are not aware," said Agnes, "that I am intimately connected with a friend of yours—that I am the ward of Mr. Sackville."

This was a fact with which Lacy was unacquainted. He knew that Sackville was a friend of the Mortons, had some property left him by Mrs. Denham, and, he believed, was her executor; but with these circumstances he troubled himself very little; and as he was not curious in investigating the minutia of other people's money concerns, and Sackville never talked on the subject, his ignorance may be easily accounted for. Lacy confessed his unconsciousness of this fact, and Agnes gratified his curiosity by briefly explaining it: after which, they proceeded to speak of their mutual acquaintance, Mr. Sackville. Lacy praised him with much warmth.

"I can hardly name the person," he said, "whom I so much admire and like. He is so clever, and yet so unassuming; so entertaining as a companion; so friendly and engaging in his manner; so truly a man of the world, in its best sense, quick, intelligent, and, at the same time, so warm and single-hearted!"

Agnes did not seem to participate in the generous ardour of his praise, but coldly asked, whether his acquaintance with Mr. Sackville had been of long standing.

"No," replied Lacy, "but time is no sure criterion of intimacy—one knows some persons better in a month than others in a year. With none did I ever become acquainted more rapidly than with Sackville. We seemed to like and understand each other from the first moment—and then, he is so frank and open! Some people wrap themselves up in mystery, but Sackville is one of those whose character one sees at once."

Agnes made no answer; but as she looked at Lacy, an incredulous smile was seen to play about her mouth.

"You don't agree with me?" said Lacy, who had observed the smile.

"Not exactly," she replied, with some hesitation. "I don't mean to disparage your penetration: but I question whether Mr Sackville is so easily fathomed by every body."

"May I ask what is *your* opinion of him?"

"I think that he is a very agreeable person, and has a great deal of talent and address."

"Which means, that you think him rather artful."

Agnes did not contradict the assertion.

"But," pursued Lacy, "that is not his general character."

"If it were, I should say that he did not deserve it. That would be a clumsy sort of artfulness which every body could perceive."

Lacy admitted the force of the remark, and asked if she could give any instances of artfulness in Sackville.

"I should be an undutiful ward if I did," replied she; "but I am not obliged to say that I *will not*, for the truth is, I *cannot*. Mr. Sackville is not one of those who furnish occasion for stories to be told about them."

"I am sorry for him," said Lacy, "for I see that he has not your good opinion."

"Do not suppose *that*," she replied. "I know few persons to whom he is not in most respects superior. I believe, I was only remarking upon him out of a spirit of opposition, because I thought you praised him overmuch."

"I have good reasons for praising him, and warmly, too," said Lacy, "perhaps you do not know how much I owe him?"

Agnes assured him that she did.

"It is a debt," continued Lacy; "which I can never either forget or repay. You might, perhaps, be amused at my awkward manner of loading my friend with every virtue under heaven; but I cannot feel that I have exceeded; how can I say too much for one who has done so much for me?"

"Really," said Agnes, "with all due respect for grateful feelings, I do not see why an obligation of that kind should blind one to a friend's faults. Accident put it in Mr. Sackville's power to save your life: I suppose he is a good swimmer (I believe he excels in most things,) and probably did this without much risk to himself. I dare say he would have done the same for any drowning person. Now, don't be shocked at me for talking so—you know I am not the person obliged. I may reason about it as coolly as I please. All I mean is, that though one is apt to run away with an idea of the greatness of this sort of chance obligation, yet it ought not, in reality, to make one feel half so grateful as many a little premeditated kindness that is suffered to pass almost unnoticed."

Lacy acknowledged the truth of the remark. "But," said he, "whether one bestows one's gratitude right or wrong, I think it is better not to reason ourselves out of any part of the little (too little) that we are apt to show."

"Ah, yes," said Agnes, looking grave; "it is you that are in the right. My foolish distinctions had better have been spared. But, in fact," pursued she, with some hesitation of manner, "I spoke because; in short I thought—I mean, that a sense of obligation may sometimes involve—may bind—really," said she, colouring deeply, and trying to laugh, "I am a sad awkward person to explain my own meaning. I dare say you will understand it better, without my saying a word more."

Lacy was rather puzzled by her manner. He had

not previously suspected that there lurked any hidden meaning that should render explanation necessary. But now her broken words and evident confusion were strangely enigmatical. The truth was, that she wished to guard him against being led by a sense of gratitude to place himself too much at the disposal and under the power of Sackville. To this she was unconsciously impelled by the increasing interest which she felt for Lacy, and of which she was scarcely sensible, till she came to explain her meaning. Hence her embarrassment; hence, unable to assign a motive, that would not be in some degree flattering to Lacy, she chose to suppress her explanation.

But Lacy, though unable satisfactorily to read her thoughts, at any rate understood sufficient to excite in him, both interest and pleasure. He caught a glimpse of the real cause of her embarrassment—imperfect it was true, but affording sufficient grounds for hope, and great latitude for a favourable interpretation. Fancy is notoriously active in its operations, and in an instant it pictured to the eyes of Lacy, Agnes Morton with all her attractions harbouring for him alone an affection which she could scarcely conceal, and allowing herself incautiously to confess the interest which she felt in his welfare. How to meet so delightful a disclosure, could be no longer a question, and he was instantly prepared to address her in the language of love. But Agnes, whose delicacy was alarmed by the situation into which she was led, quickly recovering her self-possession, endeavoured to extricate herself, by a prompt alteration of manner, from the imputation of having drawn Lacy into a premature declaration of attachment; so that when he looked up to urge his suit, he saw in her countenance an expression of such resolute reserve, of an indifference so chilling, that his hopes were immediately checked, and the

tender sentiment which he was about to express seemed ridiculous and misplaced.

To add to his discomfiture, Lord Midhurst at that moment came up, and throwing himself into a chair by Agnes, and addressing her in a very unsentimental tone of gaiety, seemed to preclude all chance of a speedy resumption of so interesting a subject. But what was worst, Agnes appeared much pleased at this interruption, entered immediately into conversation with Lord Midhurst, assumed her sprightliest manner, and seemed desirous to drown all recollection of the past, in a copious flow of lively nonsense.

Lacy was mortified: his pride was wounded by her receiving Lord Midhurst's intrusion, as if it were a relief from the irksomeness of a *tête-à-tête* with him; and he was by this time sufficiently in love to be made very jealous by such a mark of preference. His jealousy, as is usually the case, rendered him unjust; and he quickly settled in his mind, that Agnes was a manœuvring coquette, whose aim it was to play off Lord Midhurst and himself against each other, and thereby make them hasten their advances, and secure a proposal, at least from one. Lacy mentally vowed that it should not be from him; nor did he think that Agnes wished it should. Though himself a good match, he knew that, in the eyes of a fortune-hunter, he was very inferior to Lord Midhurst, whose proposals to Agnes, Lady Malvern evidently both wished and expected. With that retaliating spirit with which disappointed persons sometimes console themselves under their mortifications, he now set himself to reflect how fortunate it was that he was prevented, by a wealthier suitor, from throwing himself away upon one, who, upon second thoughts, appeared so objectionable as a wife. The coolness existing between the families, which a few hours

ago it seemed so delightful to remove, now again presented an insuperable bar. The badness of the connexion also appeared to him in glaring colours. The Mortons, if not vulgar themselves, were at any rate related to those who were; and how would the heir of the Lacys endure to have his wife be-cousined by the Bagshawes!

For this feeling of pride he momentarily reproached himself, and remembered the lesson which Agnes had taught him. But then she had not acquired like him a legitimate right to look down upon the *canaille*. "Though, if they were my relations," he said, "I hope I should behave to them as well as she does; but while the choice is in my power, I may surely be allowed to feel the force of the objection."

Then, after wondering for awhile at his own fickleness, in being now reduced to combat, with such earnestness, wishes which he had so lately began to form, he determined to resign all thoughts of Agnes, and contentedly decided that it would be much for the advantage of all parties, that she should bestow herself upon Lord Midhurst.

CHAPTER VIII.

Trincalo. I must tell you a secret, if you'll make much on't.

Armellina. As it deserves. What is it?

Trincalo. I love you, dear morsel of modesty, I love you ; and so truly that I'll make you mistress of my thoughts, lady of my revenues, and commit all my moveables into your hands.

Albumazar.

IF Lacy flattered himself that he had obtained such a mastery over his feelings, as to wish success to Lord Midhurst, his lordship thought he had ensured it. This delightful persuasion did not, however, cause him to exhibit many of the characteristics of a fortunate lover. His spirits were too uniformly good to be capable of much improvement without exceeding proper bounds. Abstraction was as foreign to his nature as flying. He was not a ruminating animal; and though he talked much, it was never to himself. When his mind was full of any subject, he always unburthened it as expeditiously as possible. He therefore had as absolute need of a confidant, as any hero in French tragedy, and his want was amply supplied; for nowhere could he have found one better suited to such an office than his useful friend Jack Luscombe.

"Jack," said he, as they walked homeward from the paddocks, where they had been passing their judgment upon Lord Appleby's racing stud, "what do you think of Miss Morton?" "She only wants blood," said Luscombe, whose own escutcheon was not one of the brightest.

"No—and she does not so much want *that*," replied Lord Midhurst, "you know her mother is aunt to Swansea. Her father was low enough to be sure—a blacksmith or locksmith, or some such thing—he or *his* father, I don't know which. She is bred pretty much like Lichfield's filly, Violante, by Tinker, out of the Duchess."

"And a fine filly that was," said Luscombe, laughing at this elegant allusion.

"And a fine girl Miss Morton is," replied the lover, "and devilish handsome, in my opinion; and I am not the only person who thinks so. There are several I could mention, who think her quite first-rate in point of face. There is Lutterworth—you know Lutterworth? I saw him one night leaning against the wall, in the pit at the Opera; with a glass screwed into his eye, staring away for an hour together. I asked him if he was star-gazing. 'Something pretty much like it,' he said; he had been looking at Miss Morton, and wanted to find out who she was. Luckily for him I happened to know. I had become acquainted a few days before, it was at Almack's, or some such place; and I asked Leicester, who knows the Malverns, if he would introduce me to her. Leicester said, in his sleepy way, that he would find an opportunity. 'Damn it,' I said, 'why cannot you *make* one?' So I made him introduce me at last. I really thought it was time to know her, for I had heard several men admire her, and Bellasys had danced with her, and you know he is great authority, and gives the tone a good deal in these things—so that one hardly could be wrong."

"Why, no—you could not, certainly," said Luscombe, as if he had maturely considered the point.

"No," replied Lord Midhurst; as you say, one could not be wrong; and then she is not like some girls, that are pretty enough, but then they want

a—a certain something—a sort of an air; you understand me; but she is so fashionable looking, and has so much style and manner, and all that sort of thing, you know.”

“Exactly so,” said Mr. Luscombe, settling his cravat, “they say she has a very good fortune.”

“Yes,” replied Lord Midhurst, looking more thoughtful than usual, “I believe she has—not that I consider that so much an object.”

Luscombe looked him full in the face. “Ah, ha, my Lord!” said he, tapping him on the shoulder, “at last I begin to understand you—Matrimony is in the wind.”

Lord Midhurst, with a little hesitation, allowed that he had some idea of the kind.

“And a good idea too,” said Luscombe. “You know I have often told you you ought to marry. We may all live single if such men as you are not to set us the example. And then, as for the choice you have made, upon my honour, if I may make bold to give my opinion of your intended, I must say I think the lady does infinite credit to your taste.”

“Do you think she will have me?” his lordship asked, smiling all the while in conscious security.

“Will she? won’t she? that’s all. My dear fellow,” lowering his voice to a kind of confidential whisper, “the game is in your own hands—you have nothing to do but to propose.”

“Haven’t I? Well, I hope I haven’t. I’ll tell you what, Luscombe, I shall rather astonish my friend Lacy. Lacy likes her, I am sure, not that I care for that; the only question is, whether she likes him.”

Luscombe smiled, and shook his head, as if he thought the thing impossible.

“You think she does not? so do I, though it is not such a very unlikely thing either. Lacy is a

good fellow, and a fairish looking sort of fellow, and thinks himself rather an insinuating style of person, though I think we shall come over him yet. He is not so devilish clever at every thing; if it was not for that infernal bad table I could beat him easily enough at billiards; and, by-the-by, now I come to think of it, he was quite wrong about the St. Leger."

By this time they had reached the house, and their *tête-à-tête* being interrupted by the accession of others, the conversation was forced to take a different turn. Lord Midhurst was quite as much in earnest as he had given Mr. Luscombe to understand; and from the usual rapidity with which he carried his intentions into effect, it seemed probable that Agnes, ere long, would receive an explicit declaration of his love. Hitherto she had not been conscious of the truth; nor was aware that he had bestowed on her any thing more than that vague admiration which he was willing to profess for many others. She had set him down as one of those unsatisfactory persons called "danglers," and had therefore never considered it necessary to express by her manner that air of discouragement which she would have adopted, had she thought that any thing serious was intended. Mirth had hitherto been the prevailing impression with which his society had inspired her: but not one grain of tenderness had ever been associated in her mind with the idea of Lord Midhurst. Probably his lordship was not aware that this was at all necessary to the success of his suit; or, perhaps, he was diffident of his qualifications for playing a sentimental part; or, logically reasoned, that if a smile can touch the heart, *a fortiori* a laugh can win it.

As his passion increased, and his spirits rose, he only laughed and joked the more, and exhibited none of that doubt and anxiety which ought to precede the decision of so eventful a question. In

the same mirthful spirit, he seemed to resolve that his proposal should bear, if possible, more the air of a frolic, than of an important compact, on which hung the welfare and happiness of each, for life.

On the morning after his conversation with Luscombe, he lounged about for several hours watching Agnes, in the hope of finding her alone. No opportunity, however, presented itself, till at length the ladies agreed to walk. Agnes being detained by some occupation which she wished to finish, the rest of the party set out before her. An opportunity now occurred of detaching her from the rest of the company, of which Lord Midhurst, who lay in wait for her near the house, gladly availed himself. Agnes, conscious only that she had not been waited for, and anxious to rejoin her party, was moving quickly along the shrubbery-walk when she heard herself addressed, and, on turning her head, saw Lord Midhurst hastening after her.

“I know who you are looking for,” said he, “they are gone round to the other side of the water; you will not easily overtake them; but,” added he, observing her look of disappointment, “one of the boats is just below—I can save you a long walk if you will allow me to ferry you across.”

To this proposal Agnes acceded, and was accordingly handed into the boat. The lake (one of the most striking features of Huntley Park) was at this point long and narrow, having more the air of a canal or river than of a lake, and lined on either side with dressed shrubbery. The distance across was very little, and Agnes anticipated a short and easy passage. But, to her surprise, Lord Midhurst, having pushed off the boat, and begun to handle his sculls, instead of rowing straight across,

turned directly down the stream. Agnes warned him that he was going wrong.

"I am allowing for the current," said he, looking rather arch.

"But surely," said Agnes, "in that case you would row against the stream, and not with it."

Lord Midhurst burst into a hearty laugh.

"I see there is no hoaxing you, Miss Morton.

"No: the real fact is, there is a better place for landing farther down."

"Thank you," replied Agnes, "but I should have been quite satisfied with the one opposite. I am afraid I am giving you a great deal of trouble."

"Oh, not at all—I like the row—I hope you are not afraid of trusting yourself to my guidance; I am a very expert person;" and he feathered his sculls with his utmost precision, in order to give her a good opinion of his skill.

Agnes assured him that she did not wish to disparage his boatman-like qualities; and, encouraged by her smile, he made the little vessel shoot merrily through the water, entertaining her, as he plied his sculls, with the humours of a regatta, and the account of a ducking he once had. During this time they had been entering rapidly into wider and deeper water, and were leaving the land and approaching the centre of the lake. Agnes had once or twice interrupted him, to express her opinion of the wrong direction in which he was taking her; but he would not be ruled; and talked, and rowed on, in spite of her remonstrance."

"Pray, Lord Midhurst," said she, at last, "do stop; we are going quite wrong, I assure you."

"Oh, we are right enough," said he, backing his oars, "but I'll stop if you wish it. Perhaps," he added, looking very significant, "you don't know what I came here for."

"No, indeed I do not," replied Agnes, certainly not to oblige me."

"Why, no, said he, "I hope it would not oblige you? for, in fact, I came here for the convenience of drowning myself."

"Did you indeed?" replied Agnes, quietly. "I am afraid they don't allow the lake to be used for such purposes."

"Don't they? that is unfortunate; but however, Miss Morton, for your comfort, I am happy to tell you that it is not positively settled that I am to do the uncivil thing by jumping over to feed the fishes, and leaving you to row back alone. Whether I drown myself or not, will depend upon your answer to a question of mine."

"And what is your question?"

"The same," said he, looking very merrily and cunningly in her face, "that a friend of mine asked a lady I know."

"And what did he ask her?"

"He asked her," said Lord Midhurst, still looking highly amused; "he asked her whether she would have him."

Agnes gave a slight start, and was in some perplexity how to act. However, still doubting whether the whole affair was not a joke, she determined to treat it as such, till she should be convinced of the contrary.

"Really!" she exclaimed with a smile, "and what might the lady's answer be?"

"You must excuse me there," said his lordship, "I want to hear yours."

Agnes again felt much embarrassed; but exerting herself to look composed, and speak with ease and gaiety, "I understand you," she replied, you are putting a case; "well then, if I were asked such a question, there is no word in the English language I could utter so easily as 'No.'"

"That is because you like to be a little tyrannical in the first instance; but you know you could recall that word as easily as you could say it."

“What I should do in such a case, can signify very little *now*,” said Agnes seriously and firmly. She hoped, by this reply, to remove the uncertainty which at present hung over their conference, and to produce so clear an understanding as should leave her no longer doubtful how to act. It succeeded beyond her expectation, for Lord Midhurst now perceiving that, whether from accident or design, his meaning had not been taken seriously, immediately set himself to act the suitor in good earnest. He had nothing to trust to but the language of the tongue and eyes, for the situation into which he had brought himself, entirely precluded any imposing elegance of attitude or manner. He could neither kneel nor stand without much difficulty and some risk: his hands, the instruments of action, that powerful aid of eloquence, were employed in the management of a pair of sculls, and his position was far from being a graceful one. Seated on a low bench, directly opposite to the lady of his affections, leaning forward on his sculls, his back bent, and toes extended against the stretcher, did he pour forth his tale of love. He told her she was an angel—that he had long suspected it, and been more and more convinced of it every day—that in his opinion she was perfect—that she fully came up to his idea of what a woman ought to be—that hers was the face he always swore by—that his happiness was in her power—that the possession of her hand, was the highest object of his ambition—and that he really could not live without her.

Agnes heard him with a heightened colour, and some agitation, though not with more than, in minds of delicacy, must always attend a communication of this nature. Her mind, from the commencement of this declaration, had been fully made up, and she availed herself of the first pause in order to reply to him.

“Now, my lord,” said she, in as quiet and steady

a tone as she could, "I understand you perfectly. When I spoke last, I was doubtful of the seriousness of your intentions. I am very sensible of the honour you do me, and am grateful for your good opinion; and I say this because such an acknowledgment is the only return I can ever make. I cannot conscientiously do otherwise than decline your proposal—nay, my lord, hear me out," said she, as he here endeavoured to interrupt her. "It is on your account, that I am going to add more. You have perhaps a right to know, why I reject your offer. I have never heard any thing to the prejudice of your character; *that* I can say with perfect truth; nor have I seen any thing in your conduct unbefitting a gentleman. But the knowing no harm of a person, is a very weak reason for accepting him. I am sure we should not suit each other. Our habits, our tastes, our ways of thinking are very different. We should have few sentiments in common; and hence might arise unhappiness to both."

Lord Midhurst here protested that whatever the difference might be (which, for his part he could not perceive) his tastes and habits should never be allowed to interfere with hers, and that she should enjoy the most perfect liberty and independence.

"You have promised very liberally, replied Agnes; "but I cannot help thinking, that, if independence is a woman's object, she had better remain single. Independence does not coincide with my ideas of what is befitting a wife. Married people should act in concert and bend to each other's wishes;—but I have no right to be lecturing upon the duties of married life, and I believe I have said enough."

Lord Midhurst here attempted to look heart-broken; and said something about despair, and being doomed to a single life. "No, my lord, do not say so: that is an old established form of words, which could never have been worse applied than in your

case. You will find many, who will suit you better than I should; and I know that you are not unreasonable in your expectations, by your having looked so low."

Lord Midhurst protested against being considered to have looked low, when he aspired to her hand. Agnes cut short his speech as quickly as she could. "Well, well," said she, "I believe I ought not to have spoken so. I must have known the answer it would call forth. Pray let us close the discussion. If I reject you, it is for your own sake, as well as for mine. I am willing to think that you deserve better than to be united to any one, who cannot return your affection. And now, Lord Midhurst, I have only two requests to make: that you will take me back instantly to the place we came from, and that you will never mention the subject again."

Lord Midhurst was prepared still to expostulate; but there was a dignity and decision in her tone and manner, which made him instantly feel the uselessness and impropriety of saying more. He therefore bowed in token of obedience, and turning his boat, prepared to convey her back again. No part of the preceding conference had been more embarrassing to the feelings of each, than was the silence that ensued. Not a word was uttered by either, and no sound was heard but the measured splash of the sculls, which only served to mark the time, and make it appear longer. Agnes tried to look at the scenery; Lord Midhurst to appear attentive only to his rowing. Each wished the other to speak, but neither liked to begin, or knew exactly what to say. Their recent subject was absolutely dismissed; and no trivial topic of conversation could accord well with their ideas after one of such interest. Besides, there were feelings of displeasure, which began to arise in the breasts of each. Agnes, when she ceased to be absorbed by the actual fact of Lord Midhurst's proposal, began

to be rather angry at the manner of it; and thought that this frolicsome style of wooing, evinced very little consideration for her feelings, and showed that, provided he was secure from the possibility of being interrupted in what he said, he little cared how publicly it was made.

Lord Midhurst was also displeased, partly with Agnes, for having rejected him, partly with himself. He now found that the scheme by which he thought to have so cleverly secured an uninterrupted *tête-à-tête* had placed him in rather an awkward situation. It was a measure, planned in the ardour of confidence, and was calculated only for successful warfare, as it afforded no means for an unobserved and honourable retreat. To have rowed the lady triumphantly to shore, blushing acknowledgements of his power over her captive heart, or even coyly entreating to be allowed time to reflect upon his offer, would have been pleasant enough; while, as he homeward plied his sculls, he might have still enforced his suit, or discussed the arrangements for their happy union. But he had never calculated upon the absolute rejection which he had received; and now, to have taken so much trouble for worse than nothing, to have schemed only for the publication of his own defeat, and to be authoritatively told by the somewhat indignant lady, to convey her instantly back again, all this was very mortifying. He had received the just punishment of his overweening confidence: and we doubt not that a galley slave may often have tugged at *his* oar with less uncomfortable feelings, than were those of Lord Midhurst during their short passage to the opposite bank.

But the worst was yet to come. As they approached the side, three gentlemen, who had been, till that instant, concealed from their view by the shrubs, walked up to assist at the disembarkation. They were Lord Malvern, Huntley, and Lacy, the

person of all others, whose observation both Lord Midhurst and Agnes would have most wished at that moment to avoid. Lacy had felt some surprise and a considerable degree of jealous uneasiness, at seeing her on the water accompanied only by Lord Midhurst. It was a pointed mark of intimacy, which made him sensible, for the moment, how great a pang her marriage would cost him. He, however, struggled against any betrayal of his feelings, and stepping cheerfully on before the others, was foremost with the offer of his hand to help Miss Morton out of the boat. Then he could not but notice her constrained air, her flushed cheek, and the nervous tremour of her hand. Thence it was plain, that the interview had been of an agitating nature. He could gain no immediate intelligence from his observation of Lord Midhurst, who was busying himself, with extraordinary earnestness, in securing the boat at its moorings, and examining the bottom inside and out, as if he thought he had discovered a leak.

“A neat little boat this,” were his first words, spoken in a tone that was not perfectly easy, and without looking any one in the face. “I have just been rowing Miss Morton to that part of the lake where the house looks so well.”

Lacy’s eye turned towards Agnes at this moment, to see how far she acquiesced in this explanation of their proceedings. He gathered only its refutation from her indignant glance, and the words, “You were very obliging,” scornfully uttered in a low tone; for Agnes, though anxious to escape observation, did not choose to become an accessory to the equivocation of Lord Midhurst’s remark.

Lord Midhurst, who had now no longer any pretence for busying himself about the boat, and was obliged to stand erect, and look about him, could not help seeming vexed and embarrassed. Hence Lacy, on whom no indications were lost,

plainly inferred that if a proposal had been made, it had not been favourably received by Agnes. The same thoughts appeared to be passing in the minds of Lord Malvern and Huntley, for as the eyes of each met those of Lacy, there was in them a look of consciousness and intelligence, which confirmed each in his opinion. These looks were not unobserved by Agnes and Lord Midhurst, and added considerably to their uneasiness. The latter, evidently ill at ease, sauntered behind, and presently turned away in a different direction to that which the party were pursuing, leaving Agnes to be escorted home by the other gentlemen. She exerted herself to talk; but the exertion was evident, and Lacy perceived that she conversed because she felt herself called upon to say something, and not because it gave her any pleasure. The gentlemen, however curious, politely abstained from all attempt to extort an explanation of what had passed; and a little sober converse about the scenery of Huntley and other places, was all that ensued during their walk to the house.

CHAPTER IX.

It was the time when Ouse display'd,
His lilies newly blown;
Their beauties I intent surveyed,
And one I wish'd my own.

COWPER.

It soon became known to all at Huntley, that Lord Midhurst had made an unsuccessful proposal to Miss Morton. Agnes very naturally told her sister what had passed, and Lady Malvern, though angry with her for having refused so good an offer, yet as the mischief was done, wisely determined to make the best of it. She was too proud of her sister's having had so rich a prize within her grasp, not to whisper it as a profound secret, to those discreet and trusty matrons, Lady Appleby and Mrs. Poole; and they, as was expected, soon divulged it, under a similar pledge, to others. Lord Midhurst also chose to be the herald of his own disgrace. Secresy did not enter into the composition of his character, and he could not refrain from imparting his griefs to his friend Luscombe. Luscombe was very properly shocked and surprised at the unaccountable folly of the young lady: but at last suggested, with a view to sooth his companion's wounded vanity, that she might have been engaged to somebody else. Lord Midhurst approved of the idea, and regretted that he had not thought, at the time, of asking her that question.

Lacy owed his information principally to Lord Malvern, with whom he had some conversation on

the subject, on the following morning. Lord Malvern was a sensible man, now about eight and twenty. He was grave, quiet, shy, and not a person who brought himself forward, or could excite much attention in any large party. He had the character of being proud, a character often given to reserved persons, and often, as in the present case, unjustly. Far from being proud, he was only too diffident; and far from asserting his rank, he shrunk from attentions which he always feared were paid rather to his situation than to himself. He liked Lacy, who had the happy art of adapting himself equally to the society of the grave and gay; and Lacy, who was fond of discoveries, liked him because he found in him more talent than he had expected. Lord Malvern, who thought that Lacy would be a very good match for his sister-in-law, and who was not without some idea of promoting it, told him, in confidence, a good deal of what he had gathered from his lady. He also added several encomiums of Agnes, and mentioned traits of character, which tended to raise her still higher in Lacy's estimation, and coincided very agreeably with those favourable impressions which he was now so ready to entertain. Lord Malvern did not seem to regret her rejection of Lord Midhurst, but rather rejoiced at her superiority to all ambitious or mercenary views, and doubted not that her great merits would eventually ensure her as good a match.

Lord Midhurst took his leave on the day after his rejection. It was not to be expected, with his good spirits and easy temper, that he should exhibit much of the appearance of a disconsolate lover. Nobody, therefore, was much surprised, at seeing how easily he recovered his gaiety. Partly from natural inclination, and partly from the wish of showing Agnes how little he minded her treatment of him, he talked and laughed quite as

much as he had done the day before. Agnes, however, was not piqued; she was only relieved from the fear of having given pain, and was confirmed in her sense of the propriety of what she had done, upon receiving such a proof of the weakness of his attachment. He was, however, as little in her thoughts, as could have been expected, and it seemed to her as if she should soon forget both him and his offer.

It was not so with Lacy; the past had made a great impression upon him. His jealousy of Lord Midhurst had been effectually disarmed: he was compelled to acquit Agnes of coquettish manœuvring; and he had received a tacit assurance, that if she were ever brought to accept him, it would be from pure regard, uninfluenced by any mercenary consideration of his being, in point of wealth and station, an eligible match. All his objections, all his prejudices had gradually melted away, and on reviewing her beauty, her elegance, her happy union of lively talents with sweetness of temper, and her unaffected openness and candour, he could not conceal from himself the fact, that he was already very much in love with her, and that he longed for an opportunity of declaring it.

But here, the recollection of Lord Midhurst's late rebuff, taught him a lesson of salutary prudence. Agnes had appeared to distinguish his lordship, quite as much, if not more than himself: why, therefore, should he, who had received even less of that favourable notice, which might be construed into encouragement, presume to expect success, where a more dignified claimant had been rejected? She might be already attached, nay, engaged to another; and Lord Malvern's confident expectation of her being eventually well-married, though not very clearly expressed, seemed to point to such a circumstance. This consideration was sufficient to render Lacy cautious, and to deter-

mine him not to avow his attachment to Miss Morton until he had reason to think, that such an avowal would be favourably received. He watched eagerly, but in vain, for any indication of such an import, throughout the two days succeeding her interview with Lord Midhurst. He even thought that her manner towards him, was more reserved than before. This was the fact, and it arose from an increasing consciousness, that she had been partly influenced in her rejection of Lord Midhurst by a growing preference for Lacy.

This happy truth Lacy would not, in all probability, have soon discovered, but for an accidental circumstance that shortly occurred. The very lake which had been the scene of his rival's discomfiture, also witnessed the elevation of Lacy's hopes. On a beautiful day, early in August, Agnes, Lady Malvern, and Miss Tyrwhitt, accompanied by Lacy and Hartley, attracted by the clear and cool appearance of the water, were walking leisurely along its edge. A sheet of water is always an agreeable object on a hot summer's day, even to those who have no taste for the picturesque: and in addition to the pleasant associations of coolness and repose which it produced, the present scene was one of no slight beauty. The broad masses of opposite wood were clearly reflected in the lake's still surface, now unruffled by any breeze, but dimpled here and there by fish that rose at flies, and by the swallows which occasionally checked their flight to dip themselves in the water. A few timid wild fowl swimming at a distance, left, in their wake, a long bright line of light across the dark reflection of the trees; while, closer to the eye, the proud, majestic swan floated indolently down the stream which flowed so gently that he scarcely seemed to move.

The bank, at the place where the party were standing, was rather steep and broken; and they

surveyed this tranquil scene from an eminence of many yards above the water's edge. The attention of Agnes was particularly attracted by a fine group of white water-lilies, that were rising from between their broad green leaves near the side.

"How beautiful they are!" she exclaimed, "I wish I had a good little dog, like the poet Cowper's, that went in and brought him the flower he wanted."

"If you will consider me a worthy substitute for the good little dog," said Lacy, "I will try what I can do."

"Thank you, but I should be ashamed of giving you that trouble."

Of course, it was a pleasure rather than a trouble; and Lacy prepared to gratify her wish.

"No, pray don't," continued she: "I don't deserve to be humoured in such a foolish whim. I am like a child that cannot see a pretty thing without wanting to touch it. It is no easy matter—pray don't attempt it."

While she was saying this, Lacy, regardless of her remonstrance, had let himself down the bank, and was at the water's edge, almost within reach of the flower.

"Now, Miss Morton," said Hartley, "I will bet you a pair of gloves that your little dog Lacy does not get you the flower without taking the water after it."

Agnes was too anxiously intent upon watching Lacy to attend to what Hartley said. "Won't you bet?" he added. "Well, you are wise, I am confident he will take the water."

At this instant, a scream from the ladies, and a loud splash from below, showed that he was right in his opinion. The lilies, when Lacy attempted to reach them, were found to grow at such a distance from the edge, that he could not extend himself far enough to touch them without support from

the side, and for this purpose he took hold with one hand of a root that projected out of the bank. While thus hanging over the water, he felt the soil on which he trod give way beneath him, and instant exertion became necessary, in order to regain a firmer footing. In so doing, he gave to the root, now his sole trust, a more violent pull than it would bear. It broke in his hand, and he fell headlong into the water. It was rather deep at that place, and Lacy at the first plunge was totally immersed. With that instinctive exertion which a sense of danger prompts, no sooner had he risen again than he instantly endeavoured to scramble out. But the bank was slippery and steep, and every tussock of grass that he grasped gave way; and at the same time a new enemy appeared, that rendered his situation rather critical. A swan that had a nest not far off, and was a near spectator of Lacy's proceedings, on witnessing this intrusion into her rightful element, instantly rushed at him, and dealt several sharp blows with her beak and wings. These Lacy fortunately warded from his head, and received upon his arms and shoulders, or the consequences might have been serious. As it was, the struggle seemed of a doubtful character. Lacy, confused by the shock of his sudden immersion, and with his eyes full of water, hardly knew, in the first instance, how he was attacked. He was once more forced under the water, and his situation seemed one of much difficulty.

Hartley, who had laughed at seeing him tumble in, now looked aghast. Lady Malvern, and Miss Tyrwhitt screamed; but it was not only at Lacy's danger, but at seeing Agnes spring alertly down the bank, and place herself within reach of the irritated swan. "Take this," she said, to Lacy, at the same moment, and threw her closed parasol towards him. Fortunately the swan gave him no

opportunity to try the effectiveness of this novel weapon, for startled by the sudden approach of Agnes, it turned round and swam away.

All this took place in a very few seconds. Scarcely was Agnes at the water's edge than Hartley was at her side, and no sooner had the swan retreated, than he was helping her up the bank, and then turned round to give a hand to Lacy, who was now exerting himself successfully to get once more upon dry land. From this time, before one could have counted twenty, they were all together upon the top of the bank, the ladies wondering, and pitying, and lamenting; Lacy and Hartley wondering and laughing, the former almost forgetting how the accident could have originated, and the latter much amused with his appearance.

"Why, you drip like a water spaniel!" said Hartley. "Don't shake yourself near the ladies. Indeed, Miss Morton, it is no joke," for Agnes gave him a look that seemed to reproach him for his levity. "All creatures shake themselves when they come out of the water. Do, my dear fellow, let me wring you. Why! you have actually lost your water-proof hat?"

"And not performed my errand," said Lacy, looking round at the place where the lilies were.

"Ay," said Hartley; "but it is of no use to go back for the flowers, for you and the swan have destroyed them between you."

"Mr. Lacy," said Agnes, "I will not keep you here shivering in wet clothes to thank you at length for having gone through so much for a whim of mine. You will easily believe that I am greatly obliged."

"You obliged! then what must I be?" said Lacy, and lowering his voice, and coming nearer to her, he added, "I saw that you were the first to assist me."

Gratifying as that recollection was to Lacy, it

could not convey more delightful sensations than did the blush which these few words had raised in Agnes' cheek. "I am sure I could not do less," was her reply, "for it was I that caused it all."

But she could not look at him as she said it; and there was an embarrassed consciousness of having betrayed the favourable state of her sentiments, that gave to her confusion of manner an inexpressible charm in the eyes of Lacy. Her words endeavoured to imply, that she would have done the same for any one in a like situation; but her looks showed, at any rate to the satisfaction of Lacy, that she had been roused to such an act of prompt exertion only by the strong interest which she felt for him. He still held in his hand the parasol which she had given him, and was now about to restore it. In giving it their hands met, and the opportunity of confirming all that his eyes had spoken, by a short, gentle pressure of hers, was too tempting to be resisted. It was the first time he had ventured so far. She evidently understood that the pressure was not accidental. She did not withdraw her hand, but she tried to turn away her head, and her lessening colour rose again.

Lacy then turned to the others, and making a few sportive remarks upon his own appearance, hastened from them to the house. His homeward walk afforded a proof of the ascendancy of mental over bodily feelings? He was bareheaded, and drenched with wet, and had received several bruises from the buffets of the swan, and, in short, was in a state of thorough discomfort. Yet never did his spirits feel more buoyant; for the glow of hope and satisfaction with which he was inspired, rendered him quite insensible to the disagreeableness of his situation.

CHAPTER X.

In love I desire that my desire may be weighed in the balance of honour, and let virtue hold the beam.

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

RECENT events afforded Lacy ample matter for meditation. He recapitulated to himself all that had been said and done, reviewed the virtues and graces of Agnes Morton, her beauty, her talents, her amiableness, her sense, and, above all, the delightful fact of which he now felt strongly assured, that she had begun to return his affection. This was the happy conviction, but for the absence of which, he would two days back have willingly offered her his hand; and now this assurance was gained. In such a case he could come but to one conclusion, and the result was a determination to offer himself to Agnes Morton.

Next arose the question, how soon his wishes were to be made known to her; and here was fresh subject for mental debate. Passion prompted an instant avowal: but Lacy, though young and ardent, was no blind slave to the impulse of passion. The fear of a repulse being removed, the prudence which had warned him of the possibility of such an evil, suggested fresh motives for caution and delay. It made him look from himself and Agnes to their respective families, and remember the unpleasant feelings with which they had long regarded each other. He considered that she whom he now wished to marry, was the daughter of parents whom he not only did not know, but of whose ill-

will towards him he could not help feeling pre-assured. Even if *their* disinclination to the match should be surmounted, there was still that of his own parents to contend with. Their prejudices against the Mortons he was now inclined to consider unreasonable; but, unreasonable or not, they were the prejudices of his parents, and as such he was bound to respect them. At any rate, it could never be consistent with the duty he owed them, to engage, without their knowledge, in a measure which was sure, in the first instance, to meet with their disapprobation. It was essential, therefore, that a communication should be made to them, and that he should endeavour to forestall their objections, and secure their answer to his arguments, before he took a step of such lasting importance. He would write to them instantly. He would await their reply; and then declare himself to Agnes. He should stay several days longer at Huntley—the Applebys showed a wish to detain him. Agnes would also remain with them another week. He should soon get an answer, and he trusted a favourable one, and all would be settled without his being obliged to depart in uncertainty.

With a mind full of these things, Lacy sat down to write. He gave a short but eloquent relation of the merits of Agnes, and his own love; and adduced many pointed arguments in favour of a conciliatory line of conduct towards the Mortons. He sat, thus interestingly employed, in his own room, unconscious of the lapse of time, till warned, by his servant, that the party were going in to dinner; and he hurried to the dining-room, which he entered in the wake of the last couple, just too late to secure a seat next to Agnes. He, however, sat opposite to her, and, unless the treacherous lights deceived him, he fancied that when their eyes met he saw her blush. He also flattered himself, that

she equally regretted his not being near her; thought she was sometimes abstracted; and saw with pleasure that she did not talk much to either of her neighbours.

Nevertheless, he was very impatient for the termination of dinner, that he might rejoin her in the drawing-room, and there enjoy the happiness of being near enough to talk to her without being heard by all the room. He was also anxious to put his letter in a train for reaching home with speed.

The post at Huntley came in in the evening; and when Lord Appleby re-entered the drawing-room, a large heap of letters was placed before him. His lordship had opened all the envelopes with the methodical solemnity of a man who has little to do, and thinks that little of great importance; and Lacy was walking up to him to solicit a frank, when a letter, taken out of one of the covers addressed to Lord Appleby, was put by him into Lacy's hand. One glance at the direction satisfied Lacy that the letter was from his mother, and he withdrew to a distant table to read it. He was not surprised, or alarmed, or even greatly interested. It was no more than he expected; for he knew that his mother was a great correspondent, and loved writing as much as his father hated it. When we say a *great* correspondent, let it be understood with respect to quantity—of the quality we shall see more hereafter. We shall, however, be happy to notice any peculiar excellence that may characterize her style. And here, be it observed, that she was distinguished for her emphatic and judicious system of *dashing*; on which account, for the better instruction of those whom it may concern, we shall insert her letter verbatim, premising that the words printed in italics were underlined in the original.

“MY DEAR HERBERT.

“Your father feeling himself unequal to the exertion of *writing*, I take up my pen to do that office *for him*. He has had a pain in the *right* arm, which makes him incapable of writing without uneasiness to *himself*; and, indeed, he has told me that, *at all events*, I should be the *properest* person to break the message to you, though I do not feel *certain* of that, nor do I think that it would have hurt your father to have written *himself*; but in fact he does not *like* the *trouble* of it; and, as you well know his usual unwillingness to do any thing of the kind, I am sure you will not be surprised at this letter coming from *me* instead of *him*.

“We wish *very much* to have you at home again, and for more *reasons* than one. I cannot give you my *authority*, but I am assured by a person who *ought* to know, that there is a *very bad* scarlet fever in the neighbourhood of Huntley Park: and as you know my *horror* of infection, I am sure you will believe the uneasiness which I feel till I know that you are out of *harm's way*, especially as I have *reason* to think that you do not take the *best care* in the world of yourself, as indeed young men don't *always* do, and *you* among the rest. But *this* is not my *only* reason for wishing you at home, for I am desired by your father to say *from him*, that he wishes to see you *immediately* upon *very important business*, which will be better explained by *word of mouth* when you come home, than I can do by letter *now*. I can assure you it is business which very nearly concerns us *all*, but *you* in particular, and it is the *principal*, and indeed I may say my *only* reason for writing: though at the same time, I would not have you *careless* about the fever, which certainly is in *that neighbourhood*.

“I hear that Mrs. Poole is now at Huntley; as-

certain if you can *how long* she will stay there, and *where* she will go *next*. I have my reasons for wishing to know *this*. I rather think, from circumstances, which it is unnecessary to mention *now*, that she will go from thence to the Kingstons.

“There is a *report* that the Ellises have laid down *two* of their carriage horses, and, for the future, will drive only a *pair*. I suppose they find it necessary to retrench. I had a great idea some time ago that they were living a little *too fast*; perhaps, however, it may not be *altogether* true, and they are only *changing* their set, for Jackson tells me that their *leaders* were not very *good ones*; but, at the same time, he has heard nothing of their buying fresh ones *in their stead*. Perhaps you may hear something about it *where you are*.

“The Dashwoods’ carriage passed by yesterday. I strongly suspect that they are going on a visit to the Rodboroughs, at Westcourt, for they were travelling in *that direction*, and they generally visit them once a year, *about this time*.

“You will be glad to hear that your sister’s little boy has cut *another* tooth; he is doing very well, though rather *feverish*, as may be expected. She is also going to part with her laundry-maid, which I am *rather sorry* for, for I always thought her a *tidy* person. She wrote to Charles two or three days ago, and, of course, mentioned all this in her letter; but Charles is *so giddy*, that I dare say he never told you any thing about it—Pray remember me kindly to him, and with our united best love, believe me, my dear son, yours, very affectionately,

“CATHERINE LACY.”

“P. S. The business I alluded to will not admit of *any delay*; therefore, pray come home *immediately*. The Applebys cannot be *offended* at your leaving them abruptly, for you have already staid

with them *longer* than you meant *at first*. Pray say every thing that is civil to them from us. *Burn this as soon as you have read it.*"

The first thing that Lacy did, after a short rumination, was to comply with the injunction of the concluding sentence, by committing his letter to the flames. He next sought out Lord and Lady Appleby, and communicated the necessity he was under of going home on the morrow. They were told that business called him thither—heard that he had received a letter from thence—hoped that all were well at Lacy Park, and were just as sorry as the occasion required.

The communication to Lady Appleby was made in the hearing of Agnes; and Lacy, who watched her manner of receiving it, saw her look up quickly as he spoke, and then, he thought, with an air of confusion, glance timidly round, and taking up a book, bend low over the leaves, as if to conceal the expression of her countenance. He judged from her manner, that the intelligence was more important to her feelings than she chose to show; and he was consoled by so thinking. He soon came round to her side, and announced his intended departure.

"Yes, so I heard you tell Lady Appleby," was the whole of her reply, and she went on examining the prints in one of the numbers of the Lodge's Portraits. There was nothing soothing in the words themselves; but Lacy rather liked the hurried manner in which they were spoken. This ineffectual effort at composure was just what a parting lover would desire.

Lacy was much mortified at being obliged to quit Huntley so soon: but he saw the necessity, and his decision was quickly formed. He had too high a sense of the duty of filial obedience, to entertain, for an instant, the idea of disregarding the request contained in his mother's letter; and he could soon add

many good reasons of his own for a speedy return. He had been doubting, whether the effect of his written statement would be as satisfactory as he at first supposed; and whether it was not highly expedient that his cause should be pleaded in person. Even then, he began to think that it might be rash to endanger his success by a sudden appeal, before his parents were even brought to regard the Mortons with common charity. The more he considered the case, the more he felt that the result which he desired must be the work of time, and that he must lead them insensibly to entertain a good opinion of their neighbours, before he startled them with the proposal of introducing a daughter of that proscribed house into the family of the Lacys. He also apprehended that some objections might exist on the part of the Mortons, which only time and opportunity would enable him to remove.

In short, he perceived that many difficulties lay in his path, and was thankful for having been timely saved from the consequences of a precipitate engagement; he must therefore return, and that soon; a longer stay at Huntley would rather retard than further his prospects, the success of which now seemed to depend chiefly upon his conciliatory operations in another quarter. He said little in the course of the evening to Agnes upon the subject of his departure; till at length, when it grew late, finding her rather apart from the rest, he came up, sat down by her, and said he was going to take leave.

"I set off early in the morning," he said; "I shall not see you after to-night—I do not know when we may meet next."

"You will not be staying at Lacy, then?"

"Yes I shall—and you I hope at Dodswell?"

Agnes smiled assent.

"We shall be near," he said; "it is but six miles. You ride, don't you, when you are at home?"

Pray don't discontinue it—there are beautiful rides near us. Perhaps I may sometimes catch a glimpse of you. Would you acknowledge me, if we were actually to meet in our unsociable quarter of the world?"

"You can answer that question yourself," replied Agnes, with a blush.

"Yes," said he, "I am sure you would—must you be going? Good night—I am glad I can say *that*—it has a pleasanter sound than 'good bye!' But you must not defraud me of the privileges of leave-taking." Then taking her passive hand, he pressed it, and exchanging one more "good night." they parted.

The next morning before Agnes had appeared at the breakfast-table, Lacy was on his road homeward.

CHAPTER XI.

Heaven doth with us, as we with torches do,
Not light them for themselves: for if our virtues
Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike
As if we had them not.

Measure for Measure.

IF Lacy's homeward journey was under a dull, unvarying sky, and through an uninteresting country, his meditations were far from being of the same monotonous character. The alternations of mental cloud and sunshine rapidly succeeded each other, as his mind recurred to the flattering retrospect, or dwelt on the uncertainties of future events. In the recollections interesting but fruitless, and in the more useful arrangement of his plans, did he beguile the time, till after several hours spent in travelling, he found himself entering the lodge gate at Lacy Park.

It was a fine place, ill kept, and conveying, as neglected beauty always does, a feeling of mournfulness. Nothing betokened the existence of hospitality, or care, or much regard for appearances. The tasteful lodge was allowed to be disfigured by a display of household utensils. The road was weedy and ill verged; the grass long, and partially grazed; and nettles and thistles, the tokens rather of bad husbandry, than of an attention to picturesque wildness, were numerously dotted over the ground, on either side of the approach.

These things, though familiar to Lacy's eye, were keenly observed in the present instance—the

more, perhaps, because he now contrasted them with the well ordered appearance of Huntley. He lamented them more than usually, not from wounded taste or mortified vanity, but from regarding them as the result of his father's unfortunate habits of indolence. This, the more he considered, the more did he regret, and longed to see him regain his due consideration in the neighbourhood. He felt, however, that much delicacy would be required in the direction of his endeavours to rouse him from this state of supineness. He sometimes even doubted whether he ought to attempt it at all, and whether he should not be wanting in the duty he owed him, if, from a selfish eagerness for his own advancement, he should infringe upon the comforts of his father's life, by urging a departure from his usual habits. This he was unwilling to do, and he determined to supply, if possible, his deficiency of exertion, by increased activity in himself.

With such thoughts he approached the house, a stately specimen of Elizabethan gothic, uniting the grandeur of outward antiquity, with the internal comforts of modern arrangement. On entering it, he inquired immediately for his parents. Lady Lacy was out in her carriage. Sir William was said to be in his study, to which Lacy instantly repaired, and, opening the door, found himself in his father's presence.

The room in which Sir William was sitting was very characteristic of the habits of its owner, and presented, like him, a singular mixture of regularity and negligence. On a table, on which numerous files of newspapers were carefully deposited, a miscellaneous heap, consisting of maps, plans, prints, letters, and other writings lay, confusedly huddled together. The neat book-shelves, that lined the walls, filled with handsome, well arranged books, were contrasted with the careless confusion

with which easy chairs, globes, pamphlets, reviews, and new publications were, in defiance of all order, variously dispersed about the room. Sir William, dressed in a long, loose frock coat, was reclining, rather than sitting, in a deep, low, well cushioned arm-chair, with an ivory leaf-cutter in one hand, and a newspaper in the other; two other papers and an Edinburgh Review, on the floor near him; an Atlas stuck in the side of his chair, a half cut quarto lying open on his knee, and a number of the Quarterly Review doubled down upon it, with the back uppermost.

He looked round, with apparent surprise, as his son entered the room, and surveyed him from head to foot, with a humorous air of scrutiny. "Himself! by all that's wonderful!" was his first salutation, holding out, at the same time, the fore-finger of the hand that held the newspaper. "Herbert, my hero! welcome to my arms—'on a shield gules three mullets argent!' Don't laugh, you dog, but tell me seriously how you are, and what brings you home so soon."

"I am quite well, Sir, I thank you—how are—?"

"Oh!—all well, from myself to the under groom inclusive. Well, but—oh, by the bye, you are just come in time to,—there—reach me that book in the brown cover—thank you—and put this Atlas up—and—well, but what brings you home so soon?"

"Surely, Sir, you know," said Herbert, with surprise.

"Do I, indeed? I was not aware of it."

"You sent for me, did not you?"

"Nay, don't ask me, you seem to know most about it. Was it by letter or express?"

"My mother," said Herbert, "wrote to say that——"

"Oh, it was your mother, then, it was not I—that alters the question."

"But she wrote to say, that you wanted to see me on particular business."

"Did she? well, I believe she was right; for I *have* some business on hand; and I remember saying I wished you were at home: and I think she told me she would write to you, but I did not particularly attend to her. And so you have come in consequence, eh? Well, all that I can say is, that I am very glad to see you, Sir. And how did you pass your time at Huntley? How did you make it out with my Lord Appleby? He is an excellent man, Herbert, and a gentlemanly man, but certainly the most insipid of God's creatures. And how he bored me once with telling me, in his roundabout way, how he had picked up an original picture of the poet Rowley. I remember I promised, whenever he would do me the favour of a visit, to show him, in return, a bust of Ossian; I hope I did not offend the man. And then there is his speechifying wife: I suppose she loaded you with pretty messages?"

"Oh, yes, she said——"

"Well, don't repeat them to me, at least; keep them all for your mother, Sir. And pray how is my friend Joe?" the name by which he called Hartley, insinuating thereby, with the jealousy of a rival wag, that he drew contributions from the stores of the facetious Joseph Miller.

"In his usual health and spirits," said Herbert.

"In spirits! and without Emily!—a graceless dog! The conjugal yoke sits lightly on him. Well, I suppose, you had a pleasant party, and killed your time very handsomely—and, by the bye, if you want employment now, just cut me the leaves of that new novel."

"And, perhaps, Sir, while I am doing that, you will tell me the business about which you wanted to see me."

"Certainly: a very reasonable request. I can

tell it in a few words. The Bloxwich estate is going to be sold, and I am inclined to buy it; and as you are the person most concerned, I wanted to know if you would like the purchase."

"Thank you, Sir, you are very good in consulting my wishes. Yes, I think I should; but it is impossible to decide, knowing so little as——"

"Yes, yes; of course it is. You shall know more before we have done with it. I have got a description of the estate. You will find it somewhere on that table," pointing to a heap of papers. "Allen sent it me; it was from him I heard that the property was upon sale. It will be sold, if possible, by private contract. I have the first refusal."

"Is the title good?"

"Yes—all right—I believe I have burnt Allen's letter; but no matter—I can tell you the substance. The estate is a good one; well timbered, well farmed; not run out; and every thing on it in the best repair. I have just sold all my mining shares, and mean to invest the money in land."

"I think," said Herbert, "it seems desirable, and I should be glad to see it yours; but, at the same time, I hope you will not let your kind desire to further my wishes, lead you into any thing like precipitation. Another circumstance also strikes me, which may deserve some consideration. The Bloxwich property lies very near Lord Rodborough's place. The house, if I remember right, can be seen from some of the Bloxwich fields, and these must form a part of the view from the windows at Westcourt. It is, therefore, a much greater object to Lord Rodborough than it can possibly be to us. You would regard the purchase merely as a good investment of money: to him it would form a valuable addition to his domain. To him, therefore, it is of much greater consequence; and I was thinking whether it might not appear unhandsome

to treat secretly for the purchase of a property which I should imagine he would be very unwilling to lose. I should think that some previous communication ought to take place upon the subject; but I beg your pardon, Sir; I believe I am merely saying what has struck you already."

"You are right, Herbert; great wits jump. I am glad to find that you are as scrupulous as your father. I refrained from mentioning my sentiments on the subject only that I might see whether yours coincided. I will now tell you what I intend to do. I shall acquaint Lord Rodborough with the offer that has been made me. I shall tell him, that viewing the local situation of the property, I consider the first refusal to be rightfully his; and that I shall suspend all further treaty for the purchase, until I learn that he has no intention of becoming its possessor. I have already written a letter to this effect, but it is not yet sent. And now, Herbert, as you happen to be here, I shall crave your assistance: I wish you to be the bearer of my letter. You are acquainted with Lord Rodborough, even more than I am myself. As the communication is an act of courtesy on my part, your visit shall render it more marked; and being present, you will have the opportunity of explaining or enlarging upon any circumstance that seems to require it."

Herbert expressed his entire compliance, and the letter was put into his hand.

"It seems singular," said Herbert, after a few moments' thought, "considering of how much greater importance this property is to Lord Rodborough than to you, that the first offer should not rather have been made to him."

"Very true, Herbert; but the fact is, Allen, who is a sharp fellow, remembered to have heard me say a short time ago that I meant to sell out of those companies, and add to my landed property.

He knows that I have money at hand, and Lord Rodborough, in spite of his fine estates, is supposed not to be blessed with an abundance of ready cash."

The conversation then ceased; it being settled that Herbert should call on Lord Rodborough, on the morrow, deliver the letter, confer with his lordship, and receive his answer.

CHAPTER XII.

La finesse n'est ni une trop bonne ni une trop mauvaise qualité, elle plane entre le vice et la vertu. BRUYERE.

Julia's a manager—she's born for rule.

YOUNG.

It will probably be by this time suspected, that it was not merely the wish expressed by Sir William Lacy, to confer with his son about the Bloxwich estate, or even the pleasure of writing, or fear of infection, on the part of Lady Lacy, which produced the letter that summoned Herbert so suddenly from Huntley park. Lady Lacy was actuated by other motives than those expressed in her letter, and made use of a wish for Herbert's return, artlessly thrown out by Sir William, as a cloak for her own purposes.

The better to explain these, it will be necessary to enter into a short account of the views of herself and her daughter, as far as they regarded Herbert.

Lady Lacy's first wish was to see him well married. But, although she had a great respect for marriage in the abstract, she was not indifferent to the choice of the future Lady Lacy, and had already chosen a help mate for Herbert, in the person of Charlotte Hartley, only sister of her present son-in-law. The parents of Mr. Hartley had been deceased rather more than a year, and both died in the same twelvemonth. They were grave, precise, austere people, of unimpeachable morals, and with a strength of religious feeling, which caused them

to be characterized, by their more worldly neighbours, by that equivocal epithet "evangelical." They were, however, unfortunately ill calculated to display these best of feelings, in an engaging light. They had not much judgment, and no talent, or natural agreeableness, and were not often even ordinarily cheerful. They were prejudiced and narrow-minded, and though really behind the rest of the world in their notions, fancied themselves much before it.

In the management of their two children, they had not been judicious. They had never endeavoured to make friends of them, and had enforced obedience as a dry matter of duty, unsupported by affection. There was no mutual confidence, no interchange of sentiment, and consequently, as might be expected, no similarity of thought. During their childhood, a question was always intrusive, a remark was presumptuous, and any thing like discussion was reprobated as a habit of arguing, or as a contradiction of those, who were older and wiser. Consequently the children grew up with separate interests, and feelings different from those of their parents, and longed only for the time, when they might break through their present restraint. They were, unfortunately, put rather too completely into possession of this independence, by a relation, who, dying a few years back, had left a considerable property, divided equally between Charles Hartley and his sister.

Charles, glad of a plausible reason for removing from home, bestowed himself and his newly gained competency upon Miss Lacy, and set up a separate establishment. Charlotte, who began at the same time to assert a right to do as she pleased, was glad to escape to her sister-in-law, and had been invited with her, to make several long visits at Lacy Park, during which time she gained very much upon the affections of Lady Lacy. She was pretty, and tol-

erably pleasing, and had that ready smile, which secured to her, from her acquaintance, the character of a good humoured girl. Her capacity was weak, and the severity of her parents operating upon a timid disposition, not strongly fortified by a sense of duty, had injured the simplicity of her character, and driven her into habits of secrecy and deceit. She was affectionate in her manner, towards those whom she really liked; and as she was fond of Lady Lacy, who was very indulgent, and not alarmingly clever, she easily convinced that lady, that she had every possible human virtue.

It naturally followed, that Lady Lacy should wish to effect a marriage between this phoenix and her son. The contiguity of estates: the very fact of the deceased parents having, like themselves, only one son and one daughter, all seemed to point out the propriety of this event. Besides, Charles Hartley was already her son-in-law, and Lady Lacy, who never dreamt of the advantages of extending the family connexions, thought that nothing could be half so desirable and appropriate, as such a double intermarriage.

Very different were the views of Mrs. Hartley. It was her aim, to prevent her brother from ever marrying at all; for she wisely foresaw that in the event of his remaining single, the whole of the fine property to which he was heir, would probably descend to her children.

The object was difficult of attainment, and called for the exercise of considerable address. It was one which she did not avow, even to her husband, well knowing, that Charles, even if he would have entered into her plans, which was very doubtful, was the worst plotter imaginable, and would probably let out the design in some unlucky fit of sportiveness. It was also directly opposed to the views of Sir William and Lady Lacy, who both wished their son to marry, and with whose opinion on this

point she always expressed the most entire concurrence. She even carried her finesse so far, as to appear to enter with great zeal into her mother's plans for effecting a marriage between Herbert and Charlotte Hartley. Indeed, upon reflection, nothing seemed so favourable to her own design. Both the parties were under her eye, both equally intimate, and always assailable by various little hints and suggestions. She saw that Charlotte was not likely to attract her brother, and that she did not care a great deal for him. She might therefore encourage the dormant passion of each, without much danger of bringing affairs to a dangerous crisis, and hoped that by adroitly blowing hot and cold, producing just a safe degree of good-will, and circulating little reports, she could bring them into such a half engaged state, as, though it might never end in marriage with Charlotte Hartley, would prevent Lacy from uniting himself to any other person.

Such being her design, we may conceive that it was with no slight alarm, that she read in a letter written to her, by her husband from Huntley, that Herbert had fallen deeply in love with Miss Morton. True as this might be, it was written very unsuspectingly by Hartley, as a mere piece of lively rhodomontade. Indeed the letter had been sent, before it was perhaps strictly true, and at all events before it was perceptible. Mrs. Hartley placed no great reliance upon the correctness of her husband's statements; but she saw that his present report had probability on its side, and her fears were sufficiently excited, to make her heartily wish her brother at home again. In the absence of her husband, she was staying at Lacy Park, and conveniently on the spot to confer with her mother.

Making common cause with her, she strongly pointed out the necessity of endeavouring to get Herbert out of harm's way, and securing dear

Charlotte from being surplanted by this dangerous intruder.

In this emergency, Sir William fortunately expressed a wish to see his son upon business, and as it was discovered that the sooner the business was concluded, the better, sufficient authority was obtained by Lady Lacy, for requiring his immediate return. Lacy, though at first surprised on finding his return so little expected, or required by his father, was rather inclined to impute fickleness to *him*, than exaggeration to his mother, however sensible at the same time, that these faults were inherent in each.

In the course of the evening Lacy tried to sound his family upon the subject of the Mortons. Sir William was cool and careless, and little disposed to talk about them. Lady Lacy, however, was less sparing of her remarks, and Herbert was grieved to perceive in her a more than usual appearance of rancour. There was not much either of force or novelty in her observations; but what they wanted in these respects, they gained in confidence and repetition. She adduced no instances of enormity, but she was quite satisfied with expressing her conviction, that the Mortons were very disagreeable people.

“But,” said Herbert, “we have hardly given ourselves fair means of judging what they are; we really know so little of them.”

“Know so little? Why, Herbert, I am sure I know quite enough of them, especially of Mr. Morton; I danced with him before you were born, and surely I ought to know what he is.”

“Oh, if you danced with him—certainly Ma’am. But that does not apply to the rest of the family. Lady Louisa for instance, is, I am told, a very quiet, unaffected woman; but then she is so great an invalid, you can never find her a sociable neighbour. The son that is abroad, is supposed to be

clever. Lady Malvern, too, is very cheerful, and conversible, and——”

“My dear Herbert, there is no use in talking; you will never persuade me, that black is white, because I know very well, that the Mortons are very disagreeable people. I always used to say they were.”

“Mr. Morton has his faults, I believe,” pursued Herbert; “however, his sister, Mrs. Denham, was by all accounts, a superior woman—very different from her brother.”

“Very different? Not at all. I knew her as well as I know you. I have seen her a thousand times; she was as like her brother as she could stare.”

“You misunderstand me, Ma’am; I was not speaking of her appearance, it was her character.”

“Well, my dear, it is all the same. I say she was very like her brother, and so she was, and so she ought to be, for they were own brother and sister, and very near of the same age. There is no use in talking, Herbert; you may say what you please, but I know that the Mortons are very disagreeable people.”

Herbert saw the inutility of argument, and was inclined to drop the subject, which probably would have been then dismissed, had not his sister, who had appeared to take no interest in what had passed, carelessly inquired what was the name of Mr. Morton’s eldest unmarried daughter.

“Agnes,” said Herbert, half-pleased, half alarmed, at the prospect of hearing his mistress canvassed.

“Oh, ay, Agnes. She is very handsome.”

Herbert glowed with pleasure, at hearing such spontaneous praise. Lady Lacy looked aghast, and stared at her daughter, as if in doubt, whether she heard her words aright. Mrs. Hartley repeated her opinion.

"Lord! Emily!" exclaimed her ladyship, in a tone of alarm, driven out of all forbearance, by what appeared to her so flagrant an instance of treachery and desertion.

"Nay, mother, surely she is handsome," replied the daughter, giving her at the same time a significant look, which said very plainly, "leave her to me."

Lady Lacy acquiesced; but sat meanwhile upon thorns, utterly unable to divine her daughter's system of proceeding, for she was not tactician enough to understand the policy of allowing an enemy any merit. Mrs. Hartley went on praising the personal graces of Agnes, till she thought she had established in her brother's mind a good opinion of her judgment. She then adroitly shifted her ground, and after one more observation upon Miss Morton's beautiful eyes, quietly added, "they say she is not good-tempered."

"Who said so?" inquired her brother.

"I don't remember," replied Mrs. Hartley.

"I saw no symptoms of ill temper," said Herbert.

"Oh, what, when you met her at the Applebys?—very likely. One never knows, unless one is quite intimate. It is that which makes marriage such a lottery. What a pretty woman her sister is!—Lady Malvern, I mean—and how well she has married! and she had very little fortune, and was not nearly so handsome as Agnes. I hear they expect her to do better still, and I dare say they will carry their point. They are dexterous people, and have always been trying to push themselves on."

Lacy could not refrain from mentioning the refusal of Lord Midhurst, as a proof of Miss Morton's disinterestedness.

"I dare say she will do better than that," said his sister; "Lord Skipton is supposed to be very

much in debt, and could not have made a handsome settlement. She was quite right in refusing Lord Midhurst, and I have no doubt her family think so."

Herbert had at this moment an unpleasant remembrance of Lord Malvern's satisfaction at the conduct of Agnes, and his confident hope of seeing her eventually well married. Doubtless he was but reckoning his lady's sentiments.

Mrs. Hartley proceeded: "I hear they want to marry her to her cousin, the Duke of Swansea: but he keeps very much aloof. The quarrel has been but lately made up. The late duke was not upon good terms with the Mortons; he did not approve of his sister's marriage; and no wonder—for it was a poor match for her."

Lady Lacy here could not refrain from telling her son and daughter, what they knew very well already, that Mr. Morton had once the presumption to aspire to her hand. She expatiated at some length upon this point, and the subject of the Mortons was then dropped.

CHAPTER XIII.

Le monde est plein de gens qui faisant exterieurement et par habitude la comparaison d'eux mêmes avec les autres decident toujours en faveur de leur propre merite, et agissent consequemment.

Un Pamphile est plein de lui même, ne se perd point de vue, ne sort point de l'idée de sa grandeur, de ses alliances, de sa charge, de sa dignite.

BRUYERE.

NEXT morning, sufficiently soon to ensure the prospect of finding Lord Rodborough at home, without being very unfashionably early, Herbert Lacy set out for Westcourt.

The peer, whom he was about to visit, was a handsome, dignified looking man, now on the verge of threescore, but still vain of his fine person, and endeavouring to render less visible the ravages of age, by youthful attire of the most fashionable kind. His prominent characteristic was an inordinate vanity which obscured many of his best qualities, and gave him an air of affectation which, when his age was taken into account, caused many persons to undervalue the sense and talent which he really possessed. He was a strange mixture of arrogance and good-nature; apparently difficult of access, and impatient of control, but, in truth, easily led by any one who would take the trouble to flatter his vanity; and though repulsive and proud in his general deportment, was courteous and winning in his manner towards those who appeared sufficiently to acknowledge his high claims. With the great importance of the Earl of Rodborough, nobody could be more fully impressed than he was himself. Po-

pularity he was both too proud and too indolent to court, and he rather took the opposite course of husbanding his civilities, and not making himself cheap and common in the eyes of his neighbours. Of them he affected to know very little; seldom asked them to his house, and paid off his scores, by a sweeping admission to occasional fêtes. His hospitalities were generally confined to people of his own set, and a few "young men about town," who came to Westcourt to kill his pheasants, and dangle in the train of Lady Rodborough.

Her ladyship was one whom, if one was required to express her character in the fewest possible words, one should call, a woman of the world. She lived for the world, and was seldom very happy out of it. Every person, and every thing, she viewed in a hard, dry, worldly light; and consequently to those who require some degree of heart, not all her conversational powers could render her perfectly agreeable. Her daughters, the Ladies Jane and Mary Sedley, were clever girls, who might have been liked, as well as admired, if they had not thought too much of themselves, and been drilled upon the exclusive system, into a scrupulous fear of committing themselves, by acknowledging any body that was not to be seen in certain parties.

After a ride of eight miles, Lacy arrived at the door of Westcourt House, an elegant and extensive mansion, in the Palladian style, built by the grandfather of the present lord. Lord Rodborough was said to be at home, and Lacy dismounted and entered the house. He was first shown into a waiting-room, containing a few family pictures, and some genealogical records of the antiquity of the owner's lineage; while the servant went to announce his presence to his lordship. After a delay well contrived, to impress the visiter with an awful sense of the exalted presence he was about to enter, the servant returned to say, that Lord Rodborough was

at liberty to see him, and he was conducted through several passages, to what seemed to be his lordship's private sitting-room. His lordship was there discovered, seated in an easy chair, with a toothpick in one hand, and a newspaper in the other.

As Lacy entered, he looked up with such an air of surprise, as might have led any one to suppose that he first became conscious at this moment, that such a person was in the house. This, however, was not the case, for the servant had previously informed him, who it was that solicited the honour of waiting upon him, and he had meanwhile been preparing himself to look as unprepared as possible. Peering with half-closed eyes at Lacy as he approached, he got up slowly from his chair, and leaning with one hand upon the table, that he might not appear to rise with too much *empresment* to receive his visiter, he extended to him one finger of the other hand, that held the toothpick, and motioning to him to take a seat, sunk back gracefully into his own chair.

After answering Lord Rodborough's gracious hope that his father was well, Lacy explained the object of his coming, and delivered the letter with which he was charged, and which his lordship received with as much condescension of manner, as if its object was to entreat a favour instead of conferring one. Indeed, he had rather it had been so, for he was very much alive to the awkwardness of being indebted to his inferior. Great also as was his respect for that self-possession, which is the result of an acquaintance with good society, yet as Lacy was a very young man, and merely the son of a baronet, he would have been better pleased to have seen him sheepishly overwhelmed with the awfulness of the presence into which he was ushered. He could then have been very gracious and encouraging, and would have kindly smoothed the terrors of his brow, in consideration for the feel-

ings of the downcast youth. But as Lacy did not seem by any means awe-stricken, he had only to open the letter, and pointing to a roll of paper that lay upon the table, "While I am casting my eye over this, Mr. Lacy," he obligingly added, "perhaps you would like to amuse yourself with looking at that map. It is a new survey of my Westcourt property." Then adjusting his cravat, slowly taking snuff, and making sonorous use of a silk pocket handkerchief, he vouchsafed to peruse Sir William Lacy's letter.

Lacy looked up at him, when he thought he had finished, and saw with surprise, a transient cloud of displeasure pass over his lordship's brow, as he folded it up again. It was not that he was otherwise than pleased with any thing expressed in the letter; but he had been ruffled by observing that there were no &c.'s under his name in the direction, and that though the edges of the note were gilt, those of the envelope were plain. Recovering himself, however, with admirable facility, and looking as if no such slights had been offered, he turned to Lacy with an affable smile, and expressed himself pleased with the contents of Sir William Lacy's communication.

"Make my compliments to your father, Mr. Lacy, and say that I feel much gratified by his attention. Let me see—which is this property he alludes to? Bloxwich? Bloxwich? Ay, I know it. It adjoins some covers of mine. I am much obliged to Sir William Lacy for remembering the circumstance. I should not have thought of it myself. Now you recall it to my mind, I perfectly recollect the place. Morton used to say, that whenever it was sold, I ought to buy it. He thought it was an object to me. Perhaps it may be so—I cannot be certain—not but if it was mine to-morrow, I might never set my foot upon it—and then as for buying estates—faith! I don't know what you may

be, but I am infernally poor, just now," said he, with a smile, and a shrug of that happy complacency, with which the lord of yearly tens of thousands, can talk of poverty and distress.

"This property, my lord," said Lacy, "would certainly be very desirable to my father. He thought, however, that from its situation, it would be still more desirable to you, and was therefore willing to waive the purchase in your favour, if you had any strong wish to possess it. Since, however—if I understand you rightly, my lord—since it is not so great an object as to make you desirous of buying it"—

"Nay," interposed Lord Rodborough, quickly, "I don't say exactly that: it is no such great object to be sure to *me*; but yet I should certainly like to have it. It joins my present estate, as you know; and it is a whim of mine, Mr. Lacy, to have as much land as I can round my house: I have very few thousand acres at present. I hold that a certain extent of domain is indispensable to a country place; one does not like to be elbowed. I beg, at the same time, that you will tell your father from me, that if I did not wish to buy the property myself, there are no hands in which I had rather see it than in his."

Lacy bowed quite as low as he thought this message demanded. Lord Rodborough having now discussed this business as long as he thought consistent with his sense of its insignificance, gave a turn to the conversation, by addressing a few questions to his young visiter.

"Is your father in parliament?"

He was answered in the negative.

"How far is it from hence to—pshaw—what a memory I have? What is the name of your father's place!"

Lacy told him.

"Ay, exactly so, called after the family name—

a nice comfortable looking place. Pray, did your father or grandfather buy it?"

The ancient blood of the Lacys felt a strong disposition to mount rather indignantly into Herbert's cheeks, as he replied that the property had been several hundred years in the family.

"Ay, indeed! I was not aware of it. Pray, are not the Dorringtons neighbours of yours?"

Lacy informed him that they lived about twenty miles off.

"Really!—then whose is that cursed fright of a red brick house, that affects a park and an avenue, about five miles from hence on the London road?"

"That is Coldfield Grange," said Herbert, "and belongs to Mr. Hartley."

"Oh, the Hartleys. Ay, I have heard of them. Is your father acquainted with them?"

Lacy explained the intimate terms they were upon, and the marriage by which the families were connected, to all which his lordship replied, by carelessly declaring that he was not aware of it.

Lord Rodborough having by this time, sufficiently exonerated himself from the imputation of knowing too much of the petty concerns of his more humble neighbours, began to exhibit what he thought would be a flattering curiosity about the habits and proceedings of Lacy himself; and prefaced his queries by asking whether he had left College.

Lacy had left it two years.

"Oh—indeed! what University?"

"Oxford."

"Hem—what college?"

"Christchurch."

"Christchurch—ah—Malvern went to Christchurch. It is not a bad college—(I was there myself)—but damned expensive. I kept eight hunters, and other things too, faith! if the truth must be told; but then I was thought to exceed a little—

I never let Malvern do such things. Do me the favour,—you are nearest to it—do me the favour to ring the bell. Did you take a degree?"

"I did."

He had taken a first class degree; but this he did not mention.

"Going into any profession?"

"None whatever."

"No profession! Perhaps you are the eldest son."

Lacy assented.

"What are your brothers to be?"

Lacy told him that he had none.

"Oh! the only son—hem! really! Do you ever hunt?"

Lacy informed him that he did.

"Fond of shooting? Much good shooting at Lacy?"

His visiter said it was tolerably good.

"I am glad to hear you are in such luck. Mine was infamous last year. You would hardly believe it, but we did not kill more in the whole season, than fourteen hundred head of pheasants. We are overrun with those damned poachers. I should like to hang up a score or two; the treadmill is too good for them.

Lacy could not sincerely applaud the humanity of this sentiment. But before he could express his guarded dissent, or avoid the question by giving a turn to the subject, the door opened, and a servant entered.

"I am going to drive out," said Lord Rodborough; "order an open carriage."

The servant withdrew, and Lacy, who thought that he had received more than a sufficient hint, rose immediately to take his leave.

"Don't go, I beg," said his lordship. "You are not detaining me in the least. Do me the favour," he added, seeing that his intimation was

not effectual. "Do me the favour to stay a few minutes while I write a short note to your father. Perhaps you would like to see the house. I will direct my servant to show it to you."

Lacy had nothing to object, and was not more obliged than the occasion required. At this moment, there entered the room, a gentlemanly good-looking man, of upright carriage, and firm step; but whom a few wrinkles, and a considerable intermixture of grey with his dark hair showed to have passed the middle age.

"Morton," said Lord Rodborough, as he approached the table, I have something to tell you. That Bloxwich farm, which you said I ought to have, is to be sold. Mr. Lacy has come here—are you acquainted," looking at each alternately, and nodding slightly by way of introduction—"Mr. Lacy has come here with a letter from his father, informing me that the property is now upon sale; and if I should have any intention to become its purchaser, he could not possibly think of interfering with my wishes. Extremely attentive in Sir William Lacy."

Lacy felt rather annoyed at the air of servility which Lord Rodborough attempted to give to his father's proceedings; and thinking that his own letter would set his conduct in a better light, took this opportunity of assuring his lordship, that his father could not have the slightest objection to the letter being seen by any friend to whom Lord Rodborough might wish to show it. His lordship looked as if he thought such a permission quite unnecessary, and coolly adding, that Morton might see it if he liked, hand it to that gentleman. The latter received it with a short glance at Lacy, which seemed to crave permission from *him*, and of which he secretly acknowledged the politeness.

"Extremely handsome," said Mr. Morton, after he had read it. "The farm is certainly, in

point of situation, by no means so great an object to Sir William Lacy as it is to you, my lord; and I see," turning towards Lacy, "that Sir William kindly resigns his claims in consequence. Nothing can be more fair and liberal: I only wish one could see more instances of this accommodating spirit: but it is not every one who, when he has a purchase in view for himself, cares how much he stands in his neighbour's light."

"Yes, yes—exactly so," said his lordship, rather impatiently, for he was not quite pleased with Mr. Morton for seeming to imply that Sir William Lacy had acted merely from a liberal wish to accommodate a neighbour, and not out of any exclusive consideration for the dignity of the Earl of Rodborough: then, hastening to change the subject, he repeated to Lacy his offer to let him see the house if he wished it.

Lacy accepted the offer, and Mr. Morton, with prompt civility, volunteered to be his conductor. Lacy was gratified by this attention, much more in fact than he could have been by any such attention from Lord Rodborough. He was pleased with Mr. Morton; and though now disposed to like as much as possible, the father of Agnes, yet he was agreeably surprised, to find him so much pleasanter than he expected. He was struck with his gentlemanly address; and having been taught to accuse him of sycophancy, was not prepared to discover that manly independence, and total absence of servility, which characterized his manner towards Lord Rodborough. He instantly became persuaded, that Mr. Morton had long had a great injustice done him by his neighbours at Lacy, and was induced by his civility to him, to believe that the ill will which had been thought reciprocal, was in fact confined to his own family.

They conversed a good deal in their passage through the rooms. Mr. Morton made civil in-

quiries after Sir William Lacy, whose habits of seclusion he seemed to suppose had proceeded entirely from ill health. Lacy afterwards mentioned his having met Lady Malvern and Agnes at Huntley Park. He thought that Mr. Morton looked inquiringly at him, as he pronounced the name of the latter, and he consequently felt some slight embarrassment. However, nothing material was said by either, and they quickly passed on to another subject, their common acquaintance, Mr. Sackville. This was a fruitful theme, for they both knew him well, and could speak about him without reserve.

"I expect him soon," said Mr. Morton, "and hope he will make a considerable stay with us. Perhaps," he added, in a different tone, "as he is so great a friend of yours, I may hope for the pleasure of seeing you at Dodswell some time during that period."

It may easily be conceived with what satisfaction Lacy received this invitation, an invitation which at once removed many of his fears of an ill reception from the Mortons, and promised to open to him every facility for frequently enjoying the society of Agnes. He abstained, however, from exhibiting any strong outward symptoms of delight, and merely bowed civilly, and professed that he should have much pleasure in waiting upon Mr. Morton.

That gentleman, who knew that Lacy and his daughter had, for the first time in their lives, passed several days together in the same house at Huntley, was fully alive to the possibility of their having made a favourable impression on each other; and in this opinion he was rather confirmed by the slight hesitation and embarrassment with which his daughter's name was mentioned by Lacy. This was barely perceptible, yet could not altogether escape the eye of one who was prepared to look for it. From the invitation which followed, we may

collect that the possibility of a marriage between Agnes and Lacy was regarded by Mr. Morton with no unfavourable eye. In fact, owing to the long cessation of his intercourse with Sir William Lacy, every spark of his previous ill will towards that gentleman had almost expired; and his pride, which was great, was now flattered by the idea of having the hand of his second daughter sought by the heir of that ancient house.

He had besides other motives of wishing to see his daughter soon united to the first wealthy suitor that offered himself. Mr. Morton was a distressed man. Proud and ostentatious, and fond of courting the society of those who were superior in means and station, he had long aspired to a style of living to which his fortune was inadequate. He was consequently, by this time deeply involved; and had already mortgaged almost every acre of his landed property. He had long been aware of the necessity of retrenchment, and had endeavoured to practise it. But the pride which led him into this ruinous system of expense, rendered vain his projects of economy. It prevented him, in the first place, from avowing his situation to his wife and children, and thereby availing himself of their co-operation. He could therefore propose no great and effectual measure of retrenchment, lest they should demand the reason. For the same cause, and for fear of exciting the suspicions of his neighbours, he made no perceptible alteration in his style of living; and satisfied himself with trifling acts of self-denial, which, although they goaded him with the constant remembrance of his embarrassment, produced a saving too small to be of any material assistance.

In this situation, he cast wistful eyes towards the large and increasing fortune of his daughter Agnes. From this fortune, unless she previously married, he could for the next five years expect no assist-

ance, as it would during that time be in the hands of trustees, who were not likely to suffer any part of it to be applied to the payment of his debts. But, in the event of his daughter's marriage, the whole income of this fortune would be at her disposal; and if her husband were himself wealthy, might probably be devoted, in a great measure, to relieve the distresses of her father.

These considerations made Mr. Morton eager to hasten this event, and ready to bestow her upon one who, in point of worldly circumstances, was so unexceptionable a match as Lacy; and this will account for his present civility to that gentleman, on whom, in this their first interview, he made a very favourable impression.

CHAPTER XIV.

The property by what it is should go,
Not by the title—she is young, wise, fair;
In these to nature she's immediate heir,
And these breed honour.

All's Well that Ends Well.

LACY, on his return from Westcourt, had a conversation with his father on the subject of his visit, when, after entertaining him with a humorous account of his reception by Lord Rodborough, and the acts and sayings of that important personage, he came at length to the more interesting relation of his meeting with Mr. Morton, and the conversation that passed between them.

Sir William listened in silence, with a manner from which it would be difficult to collect whether he was gratified or displeased. He gave a slight shrug, when his son had ended, and made no immediate reply.

"Well!" he exclaimed at length, "to give the devil his due, Morton is a well behaved man, and I find no fault with you for liking him. He can act the gentleman, very creditably. Civility is his forte. The man delights in picking up a fresh subject to practise upon. He has won all the rest of his neighbours, and now he wishes to subdue us."

"I cannot think him unwise, Sir," replied Herbert, "in wishing to cultivate your acquaintance; and I hope you will not suppose that there can be any thing mean or discreditable in such an endeavour on his part."

“Discreditable! certainly not. There, Herbert, you go too far. If I appeared at all displeased, it was only because I thought that, considering our relative situations, he might have been somewhat less precipitate. He might have suffered the first overtures to come from me.”

“In that I entirely agree with you, Sir. But I think you will find that he has not been at all wanting in delicacy towards you. His invitation was to me, and only with a view to my meeting Sackville: he expressed no intention of calling upon you, or of drawing you into a visit to him: he rather seemed to take it for granted that you would *not* visit him—inquired after your health, and spoke as if he thought that nothing but indisposition on your part had hitherto prevented him from being better acquainted.”

“Why, what the deuce!” exclaimed the baronet, with a humorous look of vexation, “does the fellow think I am bedridden? I hope you did not allow him to go away with the persuasion that your father is so poor a creature that he cannot pay a morning visit.”

“Perhaps, Sir, I was wrong; but I did not attempt to undeceive him. Indeed I hardly knew what other cause to assign, and I thought it was better that he should attribute the cessation of your intercourse to your ill health, than to any feeling of hostility.”

“Hostility! Herbert—God forbid. I am sure I wish the man no harm; and if we have never been very good friends, it is quite as much his fault as mine. If he means to be civil, so do I: if he does not, *c’est égal*. You say he has asked you to his house. Very well—then go and see him. I have not the least objection to that; only don’t drag your aged father out of his sanctuary, and set him down to the troublesome task of bandying civilities with this polished piece of hardware.”

"I thank you, Sir," said Herbert, after a short pause, "for the permission you give me; but I would, at the same time, mention that my visiting that family will place you in such a situation that you cannot, without either a marked display of incivility, or some strong plea, as that of illness, refrain from visiting them too. Mr. Morton may probably extend some invitation to yourself, and you will then be compelled to do at last, what could have been done with a better grace in the first instance, and you will be placed under the disagreeable necessity of following where you ought to lead. On this account, I cannot help wishing ——"

"I understand you," interrupted Sir William; "you wish that I should call upon him first. Very well—I will think about it. *You* may call at all events. But," he added, after a pause, "I cannot understand, Herbert, why you are now so eager to be acquainted with the very persons whom you used to hold in such aversion."

It may here be observed, in order to account for what will otherwise appear a very remarkable want of quick-sightedness, that Sir William Lacy was hitherto unacquainted with the fact of his son having met any of the Morton family at Huntley Park. Far from suspecting him of having fallen in love with Miss Morton, he was not even certain that any such person existed. He knew that the lady who *was* Miss Morton was now married to Lord Malvern; but his information did not extend to the fact of her having a younger sister. All the little details respecting the affairs of his neighbours, which the microscopic mind of Lady Lacy gleaned and retained so faithfully, were to him a species of rubbish which he impatiently dismissed from his thoughts. Nor did he often avail himself of his lady's retail assortment of petty information. Led, by a pardonable predilection for beauty, into marrying a woman of a very ordinary mind, he soon disco-

vered that there was little similarity in their turn of thought. Her vapid and pointless conversation generally gave him a sensation of weariness; and as she never understood his jokes, he had as little satisfaction in talking as in listening to her. Lady Lacy's love of talking was not checked by this want of a willing hearer: but if she did not relax in her volubility, Sir William did in his attention, and in course of time relaxed into a habit of seldom hearing any thing she said. His mechanical assent, though it might perhaps have deceived a stranger, and was even some satisfaction to Lady Lacy, was, nevertheless, the sure indication of perfect absence.

Lady Lacy, despairing of finding in her husband a willing listener to her matrimonial views respecting Herbert, had not communicated to him any of the little machinery which she had put into play, in conjunction with her daughter, for the purpose of withdrawing him from the fascinations of Miss Morton. She had, however, said a little about this young lady being at Huntley, to which little Sir William paid no attention, and was now as unconscious as if that piece of intelligence had never been uttered in his presence.

We left the baronet expressing his wonder that his son should be anxious to visit the Mortons. A silence followed this remark. Herbert was to speak, and his rising colour and anxious countenance showed that he was with some difficulty making up his mind to a communication of no common importance. His father attentively watched him, and preserved an air of silent expectation.

"I could give you," said Herbert, speaking slowly and with evident effort, "many reasons for my wish to be better acquainted with the Mortons—reasons that would be quite satisfactory, and partly real. But I could not reconcile myself to any thing short of a full explanation. I have one

reason, which with me outweighs every other. I am attached to Miss Morton."

The words were spoken almost breathlessly, and Herbert cast down his eyes as if oppressed by the effort, and wanting the will or power to look up and watch the impression they had made. Sir William heard him without exhibiting much either of surprise or displeasure. He, however, turned for an instant rather red, and looked grave and perplexed. He did not immediately speak, and the communication was followed by a silence of many seconds.

"Are you engaged to this lady?" were the baronet's first words, which were uttered in a tone studiously modulated, so as not to convey either approbation or the contrary. Herbert felt relieved by the straight-forward calmness of the question.

"I am not engaged to her, Sir," he answered. "Miss Morton has never heard me speak so explicitly as I now speak to you. But my attachment cannot be unknown to her. She must have guessed it; and I think is disposed to return it. Of this I feel so confident that I would have offered myself, without fear of rejection, when I last saw her, had I been secure of your approval. But I determined to take no further steps without first consulting you."

"Right, my boy, quite right. But let me understand who the lady is. Is she the younger sister of Lady Malvern?"

"She is."

"And you met her——"

"At Lord Appleby's."

"Humph! a very long acquaintance! I shall not ask you any thing, Herbert, about her looks and her disposition. You are attached to her—that is enough. Of course she is a phoenix in your eyes, and the only woman that can ever make you happy. I can allow for the flights of a young man

in your situation. I am not so unreasonable as to expect you to talk very rationally on such a subject."

I am aware, Sir, that whatever I say in praise of Miss Morton, must necessarily be received with some distrust; and I am therefore, the more anxious that you should be enabled to see her, and judge for yourself. This was my reason for wishing to persuade you to visit the Mortons."

"And so I will, Herbert, I was half-inclined before, but now I am determined. An old head is very useful in these cases, when you young people are in the third heaven, with your brains half turned, and your eyes not half open. I will see your lady Herbert, and I trust I shall approve of her. I don't like the family, that I tell you once for all; I never did like them, and I fear I never shall. Besides, it is a bad connexion; low—unworthy of you, and very inferior to what I always hoped you would make."

"*They* are well connected," said Herbert. "The Swanseas, the Rodboroughs——"

"True, true, others have disregarded their low extraction. There is but little pride of the true kind left, and I am the more anxious to keep alive the few sparks which I feel myself. I dare say, in this enlightened age, people would call it prejudice. Commend me, Herbert, to an old prejudice. There is often more solid virtue in it, than in all the new fangled wisdom of your modern lights. But I won't stay moralising. Oh! it will do extremely well; the Mortons sprung from the mine, and so does the diamond. There is a simile, Sir, for your lady's eyes. But it is no joking matter. It vexes me, Herbert—it vexes me; but for your sake I will make the best of it. You have behaved extremely well; you could not control your affections, nor did I expect it; but what you could do, you have done. I say again, I don't like it, but

it concerns you, more than me: and God forbid, my dear son, that I should sacrifice your happiness to the gratification of my own feelings."

Sir William held out his hand to his son, which the latter grasped with fervent gratitude, and accompanied this testimony with many a warm expression of sincere thanks.

"Herbert, you have almost gained me," pursued the baronet; "but your hardest task is still to come. This news will be a blow to your mother: she hates the Mortons, like toad or asp; and besides, I think has set her heart upon seeing you married to Charlotte Hartley. You must go cautiously to work."

"I fear I must," replied Herbert, thoughtfully. "I am thinking, when and how to break it to her."

"And I am thinking," said the baronet, "that for the present, you had better not break it to her at all. I don't counsel you to be less open in your general conduct to her, than you are to me: the same duty is owed to both. But this is a peculiar case. To your mother's virtues, Herbert, neither of us is a stranger. She is as good a wife, and as good a mother as ever lived: but she has strong prejudices—prejudices which, I fear, are not to be combatted by reason, and which time alone can soften. One of the strongest of her impressions is an aversion to the Mortons. If she sees that you are an interested person, she will receive all you say with distrust, and will only cling more firmly to her old persuasion. Pursue a gentle unobtrusive course, and in due time, I have no doubt, you may sooth her into charity with all the world, Lady Louisa Morton not excepted."

After a little further conversation, it was settled, that on an early day, Sir William Lacy should go over with his son to Dodswell, and call upon Mr. Morton. It was a great sacrifice for the baronet

to make, as it was opposed, at the same time, by his pride, his indolence, and the inveterate influence of a habit of seclusion. But his mind being once made up, cheerfully complied, and exhaled all his spleen, through the easy medium of a few testy jokes.

Lacy's prospects were also brightened, though unknown to him, by the circumstance of his sister having quitted them on that day. She was expected to be absent for the next three weeks on visits at a distance. Thus, her quiet but dangerous opposition, and the artful difficulties which she could have thrown in the way of a meeting with the Mortons, would now for a time be withdrawn, and nothing remained but to pacify the fears of Lady Lacy, whose astonishment was extreme, when she heard that Sir William was actually going to call upon the Mortons.

"Why, surely, Sir William you cannot be serious," she exclaimed, in a high pitched tone of wonder.

"Quite serious! Ask Herbert!" was his quiet reply.

"Oh, I dare say you are both in the same tale: but what makes you go to visit those Mortons, of all people in the world?"

"I will tell you in a few words. Mr. Morton met Herbert the other day, and asked him to his house. This showed a wish on his part to be civil. Herbert is bound to call upon him, and I take that opportunity of being civil too."

"It is really very strange," said her ladyship, "to visit those people now at last, after having lived near them so long, and never taken any notice; if they *were* to be called upon, why did you never do it before?"

"Very true—why did not I? But I am afraid, *that* is not worth an inquiry now. If they were ever worth visiting, they are so at present; and if

I have long arrears to pay, the sooner they are paid the better. I go to Dodswell—that is decided. You, my dear, if you like, may also do yourself the pleasure of waiting upon Lady Louisa.”

“But I don’t like, and it is not a pleasure, and Lady Louisa might have waited upon me.”

“But, my dear, you forget that she is an invalid. She has been under a course of elegant indispositions for the last ten years at least.”

“Invalid! Yes, a fine excuse!” said Lady Lacy, looking very indignant. “I dare say if I *was* to call upon her, she would not return my visit: and all because she thinks herself ill. I don’t see why I have not a right to be an invalid too.”

“So you have, my dear, an undoubted right; but not to be so great an invalid as Lady Louisa. She was a duke’s daughter, you were only a simple gentlewoman.

“That does not signify at all: a gentlewoman is a gentlewoman all the world over, and I expect to be treated as one; and I shall have nothing to do with her ladyship, I promise her, unless she calls first upon me, or sends some message to say why she does not.”

The visit was made, and terminated as such visits often do. Mr. Morton was from home, and was not expected back for several days; and the baronet and his son had only the satisfaction of leaving their cards. On their return, Lady Lacy met them with a face of more glee than could have been expected, considering how much the visit which they had just paid, had been contrary to her inclinations. She held in her hand two cards, about which she seemed to have much to say.

“Well, Sir William,” she began, “I am quite glad, that Herbert came home from Huntley, and went over to Lord Rodborough. I am sure I thought it was quite proper; and here, you see, they have not forgotten it. The servant is only

just gone. Philip says he had more cards to leave. I dare say he is going to the Hartleys—the Hartleys know Lord Rodborough and—”

“My dear Lady Lacy,” interrupted Sir William, “I dare say you are talking excellent sense, but I really cannot catch your meaning.”

Lady Lacy put into his hand two cards, one addressed to Sir William and herself, the other to Herbert, requesting the pleasure of their company to a ball, to be given by the Earl and Countess of Rodborough, at the distance of about a month from that time.

The baronet read them with a smile. “No fool like the old fool,” said he. “Lord Rodborough give a ball! why should not I? I am old enough.”

“Very true,” said his lady, quietly; “but we have no unmarried daughters, Sir William.”

“Spoken like an oracle; and you thereby imply, that those who have no unmarried daughters have no occasion to give balls. You never expressed yourself more pithily. Rest your colloquial fame on that, as Dr. Johnson said before me.”

Lady Lacy did not seem to understand him; and prudently avoiding a collision with Dr. Johnson, went on lamenting the circumstance of their having no unmarried daughters. If we had, you know, Sir William, I could have taken them to this ball.”

“True, my dear; but I would have you consider, that if you had several unmarried daughters, you might never have had this ball to take them to;” and having delivered this whimsical specimen of a logical deduction with much significance and solemnity, he withdrew, leaving Lady Lacy to the hopeless task of unravelling the hidden meaning of his parting speech.

CHAPTER XV.

Slight are the outward signs of evil thought—
Within—within—'twas there the spirit wrought.

BYRON.

ON the fourth day after Sir William Lacy's visit to Dodswell, Mr. Morton rode over to pay his respects to the baronet. His reception, though not exactly cold, was rather constrained; and there was, on either side, a measured civility, a punctilious attention, and a scrupulous selection of subjects, which showed how far they were from being upon easy terms. Lady Lacy received Mr. Morton at first with positive coldness. Herbert was not present; and the visit would probably have been far from satisfactory to the feelings of any of the parties, had not Mr. Morton been accompanied by one who was secure of a favourable reception from the Lacys, and whose ingratiating manners, and agreeable conversation tended very much to break the formality of the meeting. This was Mr. Sackville, the common friend of Herbert Lacy and the Mortons.

Mr. Sackville was, at this time, not more than thirty-four, and bore in his countenance the appearance of being still younger. He was of middling stature, and was altogether one who would not any where have been remarked, either as a handsome or an ordinary person. His face, however, if not regularly handsome, was very prepossessing, particularly when he spoke. Its expression was acute without being sarcastic; and full of mild intelligence and playful animation. There

was a fascination in his smile, and an ingratiating warmth in his manner, which made every one fancy themselves, for the time, the objects of his peculiar favour. In society he was very agreeable; his conversation was sensible, varied, and amusing, displaying considerable information and knowledge of the world, and was always adapted with much skill to the tastes of his associates. Added to this, he had an air of openness and sincerity which conciliated good opinion; and he was master of that refined flattery, which by an almost imperceptible air of deference, raises persons in their own opinion, while, at the same time, it equally exalts the character of him who employs it.

Such were the captivating qualities of Sackville; would we could add, that his disposition corresponded with the bright promise which these afforded. Sackville was an example of the slight degree of virtuous feeling attainable by a man of cool temperament and strong sense, when unawed by conscientious fears, without one sentiment of religion, regulating himself only by the practice of the world, and his own dry, self-formed rule of expediency. He was, in fact, a man without one grain of principle, utterly selfish, perfidious, and heartless: one whom no generous feeling warmed, and to whom the most touching appeal would have been made in vain. His ruling motive was self-interest, and to this he could sacrifice, with remorseless steadiness, the welfare of his dearest friends. He was not what is usually called a vicious man. He indulged in no pleasures to excess, and was regular in his habits. He knew the value of appearances, and paid a careful attention to decorum. Fortunately, as society is now constituted, morality and religion are not so unfashionable but that some appearance of both is often thought desirable, even by those who do not possess the least of either. This was precisely

Sackville's view of the case. Had atheism been fashionable he would probably have professed it; but as irreligion is no longer considered the badge of talent, he maintained a decorous observance of the ordinances of his church, and always spoke of it and its ministers with respect. He was not a man of strong passions. He neither loved nor hated violently. His proceedings were seldom influenced by feeling. They were the cool result of calculation; and, whether friend or foe opposed his plans, he was equally ready to sacrifice him. He could assume the appearance of every virtue without possessing the reality of any: nay, his very vices were subdued into order and subjection, and reserved, as it were for great occasions. His very selfishness, inordinate as it was, could be laid aside in the commerce of society; and petty kindnesses would be gracefully rendered, and little acts of self-denial cheerfully incurred in behalf, perhaps, of an individual, whom, to secure his own advantage, he could ruin without a pang. His abilities were of a high order, and while they included much that was elegant, were still eminently practical. He was very adroit in matters of business, and had a quick insight into character, and a simple and persuasive eloquence, which gave him a considerable influence over those with whom he was brought into contact. He had been several years the representative of a small borough, and had made himself useful and respected in the House of Commons; and spoke, if not ambitiously, yet always sensibly and well.

Sackville was received with great cordiality by Sir William and Lady Lacy, who, though they did not know much of him, were pleased with his manners; and who, had he been much less agreeable, would have still felt themselves bound to welcome with warmth and gladness the friend and preserver of their son. Cheered by his presence, and enlivened by his conversation, the party began to

relax from their formality: and Mr. Morton seemed to have an additional claim to the goodwill of the Lacys in his connexion with Sackville. He also appeared to feel the same himself, and, set at ease by this consideration, he was enabled to make himself agreeable to his restored acquaintance with increased success. Before he went, he had even considerably re-established himself in the good graces of Lady Lacy, and had conveyed to her an apologetic message from Lady Louisa, so prettily worded, as almost to disarm her punctilious pride, and very much soften her dislike of that lady.

When her visitors were gone, Lady Lacy allowed that Mr. Morton was not a vulgar man in his manners, and she really thought did not look much older than he did twenty years ago; and, as for Lady Louisa, she was sorry for her, poor woman! She could easily believe that she had even worse health than the world supposed—nobody knew what she suffered.

A heavy load of doubt and anxiety had been already removed from Herbert's mind by the favourable results of the few last days; and his spirits received additional exhilaration from the arrival of a note from the Mortons, inviting them all to dine at Dodswell, on Thursday the twenty-eighth; and again politely hoping that Lady Lacy would have the kindness to dispense with the formality of a call from Lady Louisa. Lady Lacy was appeased by this message; and though she vowed that she would not compromise her dignity by going over to Dodswell to call upon Lady Louisa, yet had not the least objection to dining there on the twenty-eighth. Sir William groaned at the sight of the note; wondered that people could not let each other alone; and said, with a desponding air, that his days of peace and comfort were past.

"I suppose, Sir William, I may say you will go?" said his lady, not at all moved by his distress.

“Certainly not, if you can help it. Cannot you think of some excuse?” I dare say there is no moon; come, be nervous, cannot you? You would not surely come back along those bad roads on a dark night?”

Lady Lacy went to consult the almanack, and soon informed him that on the twenty-eighth, the moon would be nearly at the full.

“Provoking!” said the baronet. “To be dragged out against one’s will to eat another man’s dinner, when one had so much rather have one’s own. Disengaged too—good moon—good health—everything against one—not the shadow of an excuse. Why could not I have the gout now? It often comes when I don’t want it—even a cold would save me—I have a good mind to have a cold, only I am so inconveniently honest, I cannot tell a lie without some foundation. Well, my lady—what now? Are you studying Moore’s predictions?”

Lady Lacy, with a puzzled look, was poring over the almanack. “They have made a mistake,” said she. “The twenty-eighth is on a Friday; now the note says, Thursday the twenty-eighth. I suppose they meant Friday—Sir William, don’t you think so?”

Sir William did not hear her.

“Sir William!” she repeated, “Friday is the twenty-eighth—we must go to them on Friday.”

“Well my dear, I am quite resigned. Oh! there is Herbert—Herbert, have you any engagement for the twenty-eighth?”

“None whatever.”

“Very well—then Lady L., you may tell them that Herbert will come too.”

Lady Lacy’s answer was soon written, sealed and sent, and nothing further occurred worthy of attention through the long interval between that time, and the twenty-eighth. The expected first visit was looked forward to with very different

feelings by the three members of the party invited—by Sir William Lacy, as a positive evil, to which he was hardly reconciled by thinking it a necessary one; by Lady Lacy, with more curiosity than she chose to confess; and by Herbert with that deep feeling of lively interest, with which a youthful lover may be supposed to contemplate an event, which restores him once more to the society of the object of his attachment. His first presentation at the king's levee, had not been half so full of interest and excitement, as was the prospect of this, the first evening that he should pass in the house of Mr. Morton. Every thing seemed to favour him—every thing had turned out well, beyond his utmost expectations. Prejudices had melted away, which he had deemed almost immoveable; and the reconciliation had been so easily effected, that he was now more inclined to wonder why the families should have been so long disunited.

All would now be healed; and Sackville, the common friend of both families, was happily at hand, to cement their friendship and strengthen their growing feelings of good will.

CHAPTER XVI.

Afflict us not, ye Gods, though sinners,
With many days like this, or dinners.

SOAME JENYNS.

At length the twenty-eighth arrived, the carriage was at the door, and after waiting some time for Sir William, with whom punctuality was not among the foremost of his virtues, the party set out for Dodswell. It was a cold and rainy afternoon, thoroughly uncomfortable, as a cold day in summer always is. Sir William was particularly annoyed at the weather, and uttered a good deal of invective against English seasons, and country hospitalities. "This is what I call pleasure," said he, with an ironical grin, as he threw himself back in the carriage. "Conceive, if you can, a spectacle more delightful, than that of a whole family going, in the very worst of weather, six miles out and back again, actuated and supported only by a noble determination to do as other people do. Seriously, this was all very well in the dark ages, but we ought to have devised some better system in the nineteenth century. People must set a higher value upon themselves, to think it can be worth your while to take all this trouble for the sake of five hours of their society. I hope we are not early. They deserve to wait dinner for asking us. I would even have the gout at this moment, to escape that purgatorial period of suspense, that one undergoes in the drawing-room. There is another blot in the system. People should sit

down as they come. Nobody should be waited for. The comfort of dinner is ruined by ceremony. If I were a king, as the children say, I would abolish the whole etiquette of the table, and let people do as they like. What in the world would it signify, if one even eat one's cheese before one's fish?"

"It would look very odd," said Lady Lacy.

"Look! ay, there we are—and pray, Ma'am, what signify *looks*? Nobody looks well, when they are eating their dinner. Nobody ever saw man, woman, or child, that sat for their portrait, painted eating; a proof that the action is not becoming."

At length they arrived within sight of Dodswell. It was a fair specimen of the average of private gentlemen's places. The grounds were of tolerable extent, but flat and tame; the house, spacious and respectable in its appearance, but by no means conspicuous for ornament; and built, in that absence of all styles, which, for want of a better name, we call English. In fine weather, the place looked tolerably pretty; but now, with its damp, green flats, its deep, dark masses of wet foliage, and the melancholy groups of dingy sheep, congregated round the black stems of the spreading elm-trees, it looked thoroughly dull and deplorable; and Sir William did nothing but abuse it all the way from the entrance-gate to the house-door.

Arrived there, and the bell being wrung with all the energy of impatience, by the dripping servant, there arose a fresh subject of complaint, in the delay, to which they were exposed, the summons not being answered with the alertness usual in such cases. The baronet grumbled exceedingly at their tardiness, and as soon as the door was opened, without more ado, bustled into the house followed by his wife and son. Mr. Morton's butler, who did not seem much better pleased than the

baronet, stared, and shuffled, and hesitated, as he conducted the party through the rooms, and at last said rather drily, "that his master and mistress were dressing for dinner."

Oh! then we are in excellent time," said Sir William. "I am glad to hear it," with a look at Lady Lacy which expressed quite the reverse.

The servant stared again, looked at their dresses, and announcing, in a muttering tone, "Sir William and Lady Lacy," as he crossed the doorway of the next room, withdrew, with the same inexplicable look of perplexity with which he met them at the entrance door.

No sooner were their names announced, and scarcely had they entered the inner sitting room, than a gentleman, in an evening dress, who was sitting in an arm chair reading a newspaper, rose and came forward to meet them, and they found themselves accosted by Mr. Sackville. He received them with that graceful ease and warmth which were always at his command; yet he was evidently taken by surprise: and there was something in his manner which they could not entirely understand.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," said he, after the first greetings. "I had given up all hopes of meeting you here."

"Why, to be sure, it is bad weather for leaving home," said the baronet; but you don't know how hardy we are."

"And we always keep our engagements," said his lady.

"Do you?" replied Sackville, with a laugh, which had evidently some meaning in it which none of his hearers comprehended.

With this they might probably have been soon made acquainted, for he was going to proceed in explanation, when the door opened, and Miss Morton entered the room. She cast a look of much

surprise at the assembled party, advanced irresolutely, seemed confused and hurried in an unusual degree, and evinced an agitation, which, for want of any other probable reason, was accounted for in the manner most flattering to Herbert, by Sir William, Lady Lacy, and the gentleman himself. These being their thoughts, it was not unnatural that they should partake of her embarrassment; and as both parties seemed very much at a loss what to do or say, the dexterous self-possession of Sackville came very seasonably to their relief. In an instant he had gone through the duties of introduction, reassured Agnes by a look, and found them a subject to begin with in the unpleasant state of the weather. But before many words could be said on this subject, both he and Agnes seemed desirous to change the conversation, and to say something else, which they scarcely knew how to bring in.

At this crisis the door was opened a second time, and in walked, slowly, Mr. Morton, dressed for dinner, deliberately unfolding a well scented cambric handkerchief. He had made two or three steps into the room, before he appeared conscious of the presence of his visitors; but upon seeing them, his surprise was testified even more strongly than was that of Agnes, and of Sackville. He stopped short, looked as if he scarcely believed his eyes, and uttered a short exclamation of astonishment. It was evident that he did not expect his guests, and that there had been some mistake: what it was, remained to be told, and this was soon done.

“We expected you yesterday,” were almost his first words; and the state of the case was made clear at once. It required all Sackville’s command of countenance, to forbear a smile at the effect of the discovery, and the exercise of all Mr. Morton’s politeness to be able to add, with a tolerable air of

sincerity, some broken sentences about "unexpected pleasure," and "glad not to miss them entirely." His chagrin, nevertheless, was very apparent, though perhaps, a good deal might pass with his guests for the effects of embarrassment and surprise. He, however, prudently covered his confusion by a speedy retreat, professedly for the purpose of apprising Lady Louisa of the arrival of their guests, but really, with a view of arranging matters behind the scenes.

He soon re-entered the saloon with Lady Louisa, where they found Lady Lacy, still inflicting upon Agnes her oft repeated wonder how the mistake should have occurred; declaring she was always very particular; never did such a thing before, nor ever knew a similar instance. Lady Louisa received her guests with great politeness and good humour; and said just what was necessary, and no more. It was an occasion admirably fitted to show her off to the best advantage; for she had too much apathy to be disconcerted or ruffled by surprise or vexation; and as her manner was almost the same to every body, that which seemed a tame and heartless greeting to intimate friends, bore a very respectable character of warmth to those who were almost perfect strangers. Therefore, though unused to shine, her well-bred placidity in the present instance, made her appear, in the eyes of her visitors, a much more amiable and agreeable person than even her more popular husband, in whom mortified vanity and habitual good breeding were exercising a painful struggle.

To a man, proud, sensitive, and ostentatious, as Mr. Morton was, it must be confessed, that the present incident, though somewhat ludicrous, was very trying. Few persons appear to advantage when suddenly put out of their way; and many who bear great trials with admirable fortitude, are not proof against the vexations of petty domestic

misadventures. In fact, Mr. Morton was wounded in his tenderest point. He had been particularly solicitous to make a favourable first impression upon the Lacys. His house had been filled, on the preceding day, with a large and fashionable party, containing, among others, Lord and Lady Malvern, and a younger brother of the Duke of Swansea, all of whom had left him that morning. It had been a party well calculated to display his high connexions, and good reception in the world; and to gain him, as he thought, the respect, and perhaps the envy, of his more aristocratic neighbour. Nothing had been wanting to make his entertainment handsome, even beyond what could have been expected from one of his apparent means; and not only had this opportunity been missed, not only had the non-arrival of the Lacys produced a delay on the preceding evening, and injured the symmetry of the arrangements, but these very people, of all others, whom he wished to impress with an idea of his consequence, must burst upon him by surprise, and make themselves witnesses of the meagre homeliness of a family dinner. Added to this, Sir William, who was always attracted by the ludicrous side of every circumstance, seemed so much diverted with their strange mistake, that Mr. Morton began to suspect that it had not been totally unintentional; and, as the baronet was known to be waggishly disposed, and had, by living so much to himself, acquired the character of an eccentric man, nothing of this kind appeared so improbable as it would have been in another person.

Mr. Morton's pride was chafed almost beyond concealment by this last galling supposition; and it was as much as he could do to preserve a proper demeanour towards his guests. His anger found a plausible vent in the long delay of dinner: and truly this was not one of the least of their miseries. For one tedious hour, at least, did they sit in dull

and blank suspense. In spite of all they could do, conversation flagged extremely. They had few topics of common interest. Mr. Morton was too fidgetty and abstracted to be in the humour to contribute much. Sir William Lacy was annoyed at having to wait so long for his dinner. Lady Louisa was no great talker; Lady Lacy was depressed by a consciousness that the whole mistake had been of her making; Herbert and Agnes did not feel quite at ease; could not shake off the impression that their situation was known and observed; and were anxiously considering the probable results of this inauspicious first visit.

Sackville was the only person who was perfectly cheerful and unembarrassed; and a little conversation between him and Herbert was almost the only thing that tended to enliven the party till the long-desired announcement of dinner. This was heard as a most welcome relief by all; for independent of those vulgar dictates of nature which periodically admonish us that, however refined, we must be fed, they would have been glad, at that time, of any change of place and occupation. Every countenance seemed to brighten, and Mr. Morton's improved in an especial manner. He was consoled by the appearance of his table, which was, all things considered, very creditable. Some of his best plate had been hastily pressed into the service. The repast, to be sure, was scanty; but then the *plateau* was rather too large for the table: so that upon the whole it did not look ill filled. By degrees he got into good humour with himself, his table, his household, and his guests; and though the fish was overdone and the soup cold, yet, trusting that in other respects Monsieur the cook, had acquitted himself in such a way as to bring no discredit on himself and his master, he at length ventured to apologize and deplore, with tolerable cheerfulness, the infamous dinner which his visitors were compelled to eat.

Only one thing more of any consequence occurred to vex him. He had some very good champagne, part of the batch which Lord Rodborough had imported, a circumstance much in its favour; and in this point was his vanity wounded. It was not that any other wine had been carelessly substituted, nor had it lost its spirit and flavour; but in their haste they had omitted to ice it. Heaven and earth! What an oversight! He took some with Lady Lacy, perceived its deficiency, and blushed as he drank it.

Meanwhile Lady Louisa, though the miseries of the table generally fall most severely on the mistress of the house, had been enjoying a state of great tranquillity. She left almost every thing to the direction of her husband: and little cared whether the arrangements of their *menage* looked well or ill in the eyes of her visitors. She frequently repeated to them, without any variation of words or tone, her regret that they had not come yesterday; but as she had not been put to the extra trouble even of a thought by their unexpected arrival, she really cared very little about it.

Agnes felt distressed, from the fear lest her father's foible should be perceptible to Herbert, and thereby lower him in his opinion. Her fears were partly justified, for Herbert was too quick and accurate an observer not to have clearly understood the nature of Mr. Morton's feelings; but as these were prompted chiefly by a wish to appear to advantage in the eyes of him and his parents, and were therefore rather flattering, he did not judge them very severely.

Matters gradually improved. The worst was past; and Mr. Morton's apprehensions began to subside when dinner was over. The effect of increasing intimacy began to be felt in a more general diffusion of vivacity; and conversation was no longer almost confined, as it had been at first, to

Herbert and Sackville. Sir William was not fond of sustaining any conversation, unless on subjects that particularly interested him, and generally confined himself to dropping occasional humorous remarks. But these, though too often, like angels' visits, "few and far between," had always an enlivening effect. Sackville had powers of entertainment which rendered him truly an acquisition, and these powers he had now exerted.

When they reassembled in the drawing-room, all were, or seemed to be, happy. Of Herbert's happiness there could be little doubt; for he soon found himself talking to Agnes rather apart from the rest, so as to be heard by her alone, recalling the few last delightful days of his visit at Huntley, all but declaring his attachment, and rejoicing to reflect that these half-admitted, half-uttered declarations, were made beneath her father's roof, under his eye, and perhaps not entirely without his approbation. He was glad to perceive that Sir William took frequent opportunities of talking to her, listened attentively to her observations, and seemed pleased with what she said. Mr. Morton's eye was also seen to turn sometimes towards his daughter and Herbert; but its expression was perfectly benign, and neither of them shrunk from its scrutiny. The latter part of the evening amply compensated to Herbert for the mortifications of its commencement, and it was with no slight regret that he found himself obliged to take his leave. The parting, however, was very satisfactory. Lady Louisa gave him a gracious smile; Mr. Morton shook him very cordially by the hand, and Agnes allowed him to take hers; nor did she at all displease him by the conscious blush with which, fearful of observation, she withdrew it from his prolonged pressure.

All the party went away well pleased with the result of the visit. Sir William had collected ample food for his love of the ludicrous in the event

of the evening; and gave full vent, on his way home, to all the satirical pleasantries that had come across his fancy during the last five hours. "I like this Morton," said he: "the man has some pleasant absurdities in him. I don't care if I take pot-luck with him again. He is like a land tortoise: if you want to see him to advantage you must take him unawares, before he can get his head into his shell. The animal's mail stands him in the same stead that good breeding does Morton."

Lady Lacy was confirmed, by the observation of this evening, in her opinion that Mr. Morton was certainly a gentlemanly man; thought Lady Louisa an agreeable woman; remarked how handsomely they seemed to live, and shrewdly suspected that this was not their every-day style, and that, in fact, whatever they might say, they certainly had expected them.

Before they retired to rest, Sir William took an opportunity of conveying to his son privately, the result of his observations upon Agnes Morton. "Herbert," said he, "to set your mind at ease—I like her. I will say nothing of her looks. I could not make you think her handsomer by any thing that I could add, and if I did not admire her beauty you would only wonder at my want of taste. I cannot judge of her disposition. It may be good, or it may be bad, for all one knows after five hours' acquaintance. Her manners, I think, are good; they are natural and elegant, and free from peculiarity. I should think she was sensible. I did not hear her say a foolish thing, but all was right-minded and well-expressed. She has a turn for pleasantries; *that* I like. I don't want girls to be brilliant themselves, but they ought to understand the brilliancies of others. It is a great thing to be able to laugh at the right time; and it is an art, let me tell you, which few possess. Miss Morton does possess it; and thence I augur well of her capacity.

She seems to have read, and to like reading. That is another good thing. It saves women from tittle-tattle, and much ado about nothing. Then, she is observant and well-judging. I thought she seemed distressed for her father, when she saw him fretting and fidgetting, because the fish was overdone, and his overgrown *plateau* had been set on in the hurry rather awry. I am sure she would be above such trifles. I think I have said enough to show you that I don't disapprove of her; but still you must not be precipitate—I won't have you throw yourself at her feet yet—let us grow better acquainted with the Mortons before our families are irrevocably united. I wish for prudence and circumspection, and you, Herbert, are one from whom I can look for obedience, even in such a case as this. And now, good night. Digest at your leisure all that I have said about Miss Morton; and if you have any grace, you will dream of her."

Whether Lacy fulfilled to the letter his father's injunctions, has not been clearly ascertained: but never certainly had he retired to rest with a more triumphant sense of difficulties overcome, and a more full assurance of eventual and speedy success, than visited his mind that night. Armed with the approbation of both the fathers, fearing from the mothers no violent opposition, and satisfied of the unaltered state of the affections of Agnes, what obstructions could he apprehend? The prospect was fair and flattering; and that benignant Providence which kindly withholds from us a knowledge of the future, allowed him still to revel in that sweetest of mortal banquets—Hope.

CHAPTER XVII.

Conspiracies no sooner should be formed
Than executed.

ADDISON... *Cato*.

ANY observant person who had studied the looks and manner of Agnes and Lacy during the visit which has been above described, would have come to the conclusion that an attachment subsisted between them. No wonder, then, that such fact should have been rendered as clear to the quick comprehension of Sackville as if it had been avowed to him by the parties themselves. He saw that they were attached; and saw it with surprise, displeasure, and dismay. He saw it with surprise, because he knew that only a few weeks before they had been total strangers, strangers who had no desire to become acquainted, and whose impressions of each other were, if any thing, unfavourable. He saw it with displeasure, because it promised to interfere with a project which, of all others, he had most at heart—that of uniting himself with Agnes Morton. The motives which inclined him to this were various: but their result was a determination of the most firm and unalterable kind. He loved her as much as it was in his nature to love any one: he admired her beauty, and could appreciate the extent of her capacity, and the excellence of her disposition. By these she was strongly recommended to his choice: but perhaps not more strongly

than by the circumstance of her inheriting a fortune of eighty thousand pounds.

Other causes also contributed to strengthen his resolution. Being nearly related to the husband of Miss Morton's aunt, he had passed much of his time with them, and, after the death of Mr. Denham, obtained a strong influence over his widow, and became her counsellor and assistant in the direction of her affairs. This influence he was too careful of public opinion to abuse to any very obvious extent; and he allowed her, after leaving her landed property and a handsome legacy to him, to bequeath the greater part of her fortune to Agnes, her adopted niece. But he did not do this without having his recompense in view. He was struck by the budding graces of the little girl; and trusting that she would be no less charming as she advanced to womanhood, internally resolved to remunerate himself for his present disinterestedness, by making the young heiress at some future time his wife. For this purpose he contrived that her fortune should be placed in the hands of two trustees, himself, and a Mr. Hawkesworth, an elderly man of great respectability, but whose timidity of character put him completely under the control of Sackville. He also contrived that she should be debarred from marrying, under pain of forfeiture, before the age of twenty-four, without the consent of her trustees, and that meanwhile the greater part of her fortune, instead of being appropriated to supporting the extravagance of her father, should be allowed to accumulate in their hands.

Such were his plans for the attainment of an object which, having once determined to be desirable, he now, with that stern inflexibility of purpose which belonged to his character, steadily resolved to carry. Hitherto he had been slow and cautious in his operations, and had endeavoured to

effect his object in attempting to awaken, by a course of the most unobtrusive and delicate attentions, some sentiment of attachment in the bosom of his young ward. In this, he now found that he had utterly failed, and all hopes from such a course must be at once abandoned. She was even attached to another; to one whom her parents would approve, who returned her love, who might even within a few hours declare his passion, and be accepted. The case was urgent and admitted of no delay.

But Sackville did not despair. He knew his resources, and was confident in his address. He knew that the blow he meditated, to be effectual, must be speedy; and, before he closed his eyes, that very night he had devised a plan of operations which were to be carried into effect on the morrow. Next morning, soon after breakfast, he rode over to Lacy Park, where he passed a long time in lively conversation with Sir William, and that friend, whose happiness he was then plotting to destroy. The ostensible object of his visit was to show to Herbert a letter from a common friend of theirs, then abroad, in which he was mentioned. His real object was to ascertain whether he intended to call that day at Dodswell; and, if he did, to return with him, and to contrive, if possible, that he should have no opportunity of then making his proposal either to Agnes or to Mr. Morton. Happily for Sackville, Herbert was found to have no such intention; for he had been schooled into forbearance by the injunctions of his father, and was comforted with the reflection that, at all events, he should again meet Agnes at the Westcourt ball on the following Wednesday.

Satisfied on this point, Sackville quitted the Lacys and returned to Dodswell shortly before dinner. At table he frankly detailed his proceedings, talked a good deal about the Lacys, and in a manner ra-

ther favourable to them, and spoke in terms of high regard for Herbert.

"I like him very much," said he, in a tone of perfect ease and sincerity; "and I think Miss Hartley is very fortunate in her prospects—if I may venture to say such a thing—for you know," he added, turning with a smile to Agnes, "in case of matrimony, the good fortune is always presumed to be on our side."

Agnes mechanically assented, scarcely knowing what she said: for this startling intelligence had been so suddenly and indirectly conveyed, that instead of showing any strong emotion, she sat rather with an air of one who did not comprehend the meaning of what had been said. Sackville did not wish to embarrass her; and, therefore, directing his conversation to Mr. Morton, who looked even more affected by the intelligence than his daughter, he asked him whether he had heard before that Lacy was to be married to Miss Hartley. Mr. Morton replied with a faint and unwilling "yes," and striving to look indifferent, inquired whether Sackville believed the report.

"I think it is probable," said he, quietly: "they seem well suited, and have been thrown a good deal together. Lady Lacy first led me to suspect that such a thing was in view. Lacy himself, too, looked rather conscious when I talked to him once about Miss Hartley. In short, I have no doubt of it; and I am glad to think it will be so. You know Charles Hartley married the sister. There is something comfortable in a double alliance; and it will be an excellent match for her."

"Will it be as well for him?" said Mr. Morton.

"Why, yes—I should think it would. She has two great requisites, beauty and fortune; and is a pleasant, good humoured sort of girl. I suppose you know her?" turning to Agnes.

Agnes could, by this time, reply with much ap-

parent calmness, that she was but slightly acquainted with Miss Hartley; when Sackville, again turning from her, proceeded, in the same composed tone, to talk of Lacy's expected marriage. "I am glad," said he, "that my friend Lacy has done trifling with ladies' hearts. He is thought to be *un peu volage*—I won't say quite a male coquet—but perhaps a little too fond of being only too agreeable. I could name more than one instance where he has raised false expectations. I don't suppose he meant to do so; but however, with that unfortunate captivation of manner, an engagement is the luckiest thing in the world for him; for otherwise, one day or other, he will find himself called to account, poor fellow, for jilting some love-lorn young lady whom he would fancy he had merely been treating with a little common civility."

No immediate reply was made to this observation. Agnes, who was not called upon to speak, remained silent; and Mr. Morton wished to appear too much occupied in cutting up a pine to think or talk of any thing else. Lady Louisa, who was not usually prompt in reply, was now the first to speak.

"I don't know," said she, "whether I know Miss Hartley. Agnes, do I?"

Agnes could not tell.

"I think I have seen her," pursued Lady Louisa, "Is not she dark?"

"No—fair," said Sackville.

"Fair? Oh! then I have not seen her: and so she is to be married to Mr. Lacy. Well! it is a very nice match. Was not this what Charles Eustace was talking about? No—it was Mr. Ducie's marriage. Was it Mr. Ducie or Mr. Lacy that you pulled out of the water once?"

Sackville told her.

"Oh, Mr. Lacy, was it? I always confound the names. Well, they are both very nice young men.

Agnes, shall we go?" and the ladies rose and retired to the drawing room.

There Agnes was visited by many an anxious thought which the preceding conversation had excited. She now remembered to have heard, two months ago, some intimations of Lacy's engagement to Miss Hartley, to which, being then unacquainted with Lacy, she paid very little attention. She also remembered to have heard imputations of fickleness thrown out respecting him, which, however slight, unpleasantly confirmed the representations of Sackville. Circumstances all at once appeared in a light in which her growing attachment had not hitherto permitted her to view them. It was, she confessed, but too possible that she had been construing his attentions more seriously than his real sentiments would warrant; and she now internally reproached herself for the precipitate surrender of her affections. A delightful vision which she had long indulged, was dispelled in an instant; and, though there was still much in her prospects to which a sanguine mind would cling with confidence, yet prudence warned her to guard her heart against the admission of hopes which might prove to be fallacious.

We must now return to the dining room, where we left the gentlemen together. Sackville, when the ladies had retired, became absorbed in meditation. His manner attracted the attention of Mr. Morton, who looked at him with an air of inquiry, and would fain have asked the subject of his thoughts. In truth, Sackville only waited for such a question, but as it never came, he was at length compelled to break silence.

"We have been long acquainted," said he, speaking with apparent effort, "and I trust you will believe that it must be painful to me to make any communication which may give you uneasiness." He stopped for a moment. Mr. Morton made no an-

swer, and Sackville slowly proceeded. "I have much to tell you which I scarcely know how to tell. Perhaps you will say, when you know all, that I hesitate from tenderness to my own feelings; but, in truth, it is rather from respect to yours: I can bear the avowal, or I should not undertake to make it. Excuse this weakness. When I come to the point, I am as irresolute as a child."

He paused, and drew his hand across his forehead, while Mr. Morton regarded him with breathless attention.

"It shall be told," said Sackville, with a sudden effort. "Mr. Morton, I am a distressed man."

A short silence followed this confession. Mr. Morton looked at him in mute astonishment, and seemed too much surprised to give utterance to any thing beyond a half articulate exclamation of doubt.

"Yes," pursued Sackville, with a sigh; "it is too true. You wonder, and with reason; how I can have brought myself into such a situation. I am not an extravagant man, and I flattered myself, till lately, not an imprudent one. But my fortune is not large, and I have diminished it, partly by unsuccessful speculations; partly—no matter how. The long and the short is, that I am in debt. Allen is my chief creditor; he presses for immediate payment; I have not the means of satisfying him; and, in truth, I know not what to do."

Mr. Morton looked grieved and perplexed, and could only express his dismay and wonder in broken sentences; then, lamented that it was out of his power to assist him; and at last, remarked, by way of consolation, that, as Sackville was in parliament, his person, at all events, was safe.

"True," replied Sackville; "but that is a scanty source of comfort. I may, it is true, escape a gaol; but can I escape the coolness, the scorn, with which the world invariably view a ruined man? Can I hold up my head again in the presence of

those whom I used to regard as no more than my equals? No—no—I never could; I should lose my station; I should be shunned, scouted, and by those who used to court my acquaintance. Oh! it is a dreadful situation, and must be concealed at all costs.”

“True—too true,” replied Mr. Morton, with a sigh; “and I assure you, my dear Sackville, that I feel for you deeply; I am afraid it will be idle for me to pretend to assist you; but, if I might take the liberty of old friendship, and ask to be made, in some degree, your confidant; if I might know how you are involved; excuse me if I take a liberty.”

“I thank you a thousand times,” replied Sackville. “You have taken a load off my mind; I did not know whether I might dare to be explicit; but now I will tell you all; I shall hurt you by what I say; but I trust you will forgive it. May I go on?” said he, and fixed his penetrating eyes on those of Mr. Morton; who, turning pale with apprehension, replied in a trembling voice, “You may.”

“Then, Mr. Morton,” resumed Sackville, sinking his voice to an impressive whisper, “it becomes my painful duty to tell you, that I am fully acquainted with your embarrassments.”

Mr. Morton started, turned alternately red and pale, and could only re-echo the words of Sackville, as if endeavouring to question their correctness.

“Yes,” pursued Sackville; “I know that you are distressed as well as I; do not be angry with me for saying so. This is no needless communication. Be assured that I should never have uttered what must be so galling to the feelings of both of us, if the case were not urgent. Why I do it, remains to be told—and it is the hardest task of all. I am fully informed of the extent and nature of many of your debts—and that, within the last

year, you have been twice on the brink of arrest. Yes, Mr. Morton, it is true; you have twice been nearer an arrest than you imagine; but that blow, thank God! has been warded off. A friend stepped in, treated with your creditors, induced a few of them to be patient, and bought up your debts to a large amount, from those who were most urgent in their demands. He did this, as he then thought, with tolerable ease and safety to himself; with some sacrifice, it is true, but not more than he was willing to make for the sake of an old and valued friend. Since that time, circumstances have been changed; he has become involved himself, and the terrible alternative of his own ruin, or of a cruel exposure of your embarrassments, now stares him in the face. But he had rather the former should happen than that misfortune should fall on you and your excellent family."

"I see it all," exclaimed Mr. Morton, with emotion. "You are the man—and may God reward you—I cannot thank you as I ought."

"Your thanks, my dear Sir, are more than sufficient," replied Sackville, grasping his hand. "But it is painful to dwell on these things; I will come quickly to particulars, and dismiss the subject as soon as I can. Here," producing a paper, "is a list of the bond debts in which I am now your creditor."

Mr. Morton received it in silence, and his countenance fell as he perused it. "I am lost, I am lost," he exclaimed, in a tone of desponding helplessness. "That I should be reduced to such a state! You say you are ruined unless I repay you?"

"Too certainly," replied Sackville, mournfully.

"And that must never be allowed. Yet, as for paying, I could not command the hundredth part of the sum I owe you; and then, as for exposure, I do not fear it on my own account—but my family!

Oh! to disgrace my family! Sackville, you are not a father—you cannot tell what I suffer.”

He buried his face in his hands; and several seconds were passed in silence, when suddenly starting up, he exclaimed. “For the love of heaven, tell me what I am to do!”

Sackville looked down and his countenance assumed an air of agitation. Something seemed to ruffle his composure in an unusual degree, and a secret was evidently struggling in his bosom, which he almost wanted the power to disclose.

“This is terrible,” said he, aloud, but as if unconscious of being heard; “it is not the time, but I am compelled!” Then turning to Mr. Morton, “You cannot conceive the pain with which I now speak to you. I have to express feelings which I have long intended to declare. I wish I had done so sooner, for I should then have been spared the pain of avowing them at so unseasonable a time. I feel that it is profanation to utter them now, but necessity compels.”

He paused, and Mr. Morton looked anxiously in his face, but made no observation. Sackville laid his hand upon his arm, and in a subdued tone proceeded. “I am going to tell you, what you have probably long suspected. Nobody who has had the advantage of the intimate acquaintance with your daughter Agnes which I have enjoyed, could fail to have been struck with her many delightful qualities; and having observed them, could feel other than attachment. To become her husband has long been the fondest object of my ambition; and I feel it to be no slight additional recommendation, that in being united to so much excellence, I should be binding myself still closer to a family, for all of whom I entertain so sincere a regard.”

Mr. Morton looked surprised, and embarrassed, nor did his looks belie his feelings, for this declaration was quite unexpected, and very unwelcome. Being assured by Lacy’s manner that he felt a

strong admiration for Agnes, he had begun to calculate upon the possibility and desirableness of an alliance in that quarter; and seeing that Lacy's attentions were received with pleasure by his daughter, he feared that she would not be easily brought to admit the addresses of any other person. These considerations caused him to ponder, and to receive Sackville's avowal with apparent coldness.

"I am very sensible," said he at length, with a feeble hesitating voice, "of the honour you do my daughter. It must be gratifying to a father to think, that her merits should be so favourably estimated by one of your excellent judgment. She has been a treasure to me, and will be doubly so to the man who is so fortunate as to win her affections. If you are that person, I sincerely congratulate you."

"And I receive your congratulations most gratefully," replied Sackville. "I feel perfectly assured of the state of her affections, and upon that assurance, I now apply for your sanction. Do not, if you respect my feelings, express any further doubt upon a subject so interesting to me, and on which I, the person most concerned, am perfectly satisfied."

Mr. Morton checked a sigh, and sat vainly labouring to frame an answer which should convey a grateful sense of Sackville's kindness, without committing himself by a positive acceptance of his proposal. Before he could give it utterance, Sackville had proceeded.

"I see that you are surprised at the time and manner of my application, and I do not wonder at it. It is most unseasonable and abrupt, and requires some explanation. It hurts me very much to seem so deficient in delicacy and respect; but you will pity me when you know all, and I hope forgive me. Mr. Morton, a report has gone abroad, I know not how, that I am engaged to

Miss Morton. My chief creditor, I will name him, Allen, has taxed me with it. I denied the engagement. He then persisted that I had at least an intention of offering myself. I could not deny it, and would return him no answer. A week ago, he sent me this letter, pressing for a settlement of our accounts, and alluding very broadly to my eventual ability to satisfy all his demands in case of a certain event. I took an opportunity of calling to remonstrate with him this morning, and to pray for further time. I found him inflexible, but upon one condition. You do not know how it hurts me to mention it—to mix *her* name with this rascal's dirty traffickings. But I am the slave of circumstances, and must not give way to refinement. To be brief, he promises to let my debt stand over for two years more on condition of my producing a written paper signed by you, acknowledging me as your future son-in-law. He will then suspend his claims upon me, and I shall not be driven by necessity to subject you to inconvenience. These, my dear Sir, are the humiliating circumstances, under which, I appear before you as the suitor of your daughter, and beg for a privilege, which I should consider cheap at any price, but that of honour. My feelings towards her, are only those of the purest and most disinterested attachment; and it is galling to me to have them first declared to you in a way that may subject them to suspicion. I have, however, one consolation beyond my hopes. I shall be enabled, if you accept my prayer, to relieve you from serious difficulties; and, believe me, this will be a circumstance which I shall remember with satisfaction to the latest moments of my life."

It was with mingled emotions of gratitude and fear, that Mr. Morton listened to this appeal. He was unwilling to urge what might entail the sacrifice of his daughter's happiness; he was grateful to Sackville; he saw the strength of his claims; and

he read a something in his eye, which told him how dreadful might be the consequences, if, by a refusal, he should convert that friend into an enemy; and how easily might he be precipitated, through his means, from that station, the loss of which he felt as if he could scarcely survive. He therefore turned to Sackville with an acquiescent smile; told him that he was happy in the prospect of their nearer relationship, and grasped the hand that was promptly extended, in ratification of their contract. This done, Sackville, without allowing him to recede, but instantly assuming the affair to be settled, poured forth his thanks and professions, vowing eternal love to Agnes, and the most unbounded regard and deference towards his chosen father.

“And now, my dear Sir,” said he, still pursuing the same studied air of respect, “after you have kindly conceded so much to my wishes, I am emboldened to make another request. I have said nothing to your daughter upon this subject; I wish the first intimation of my intentions to come from you. May I beg that you will take an early opportunity of speaking to her? Excuse my pressing for an early communication. Lovers, you know, are proverbially impatient. See her and prepare her. I know that I shall find in you an able advocate, and that, whatever points appear in my favour, will be set before her in a convincing light. A young mind like hers, however well disposed towards the suitor, is apt to look at first with some alarm to the prospect of matrimony: but I rely upon your skill and judgment. Pray put me soon out of suspense. I am impatient to receive her answer. Much will depend upon it.”

These few last words were uttered with a peculiar inflexion of tone, which distinctly painted to Mr. Morton the terrible alternative which might attend the failure of his errand. They precluded all refusal, and Mr. Morton, though little confident of

his daughter's favourable reception of the proposal, summoning into his countenance a feeble effort at cheerful acquiescence, without one audible murmur complied with all that Sackville asked.

Here this important conference ended, and the gentlemen adjourned, to join the ladies in the saloon.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Force cannot be the school of love.

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

Marriage is a matter of more worth
Than to be dealt in by attorneyship.

HENRY VI. *Part 1.*

ON the following morning, Agnes, by her father's desire, repaired to his private sitting-room. He looked pale and dejected, for he knew that his fate depended on his daughter's compliance, which would not be obtained without a struggle, and the probable sacrifice of her happiness. He endeavoured to gain time and courage by speaking first on irrelevant subjects, and brought round the conversation as naturally as he could to Sackville.

"How fortunate we are," said he, "in having so able and intelligent a friend; so kind and attentive to your interests—to the interests, indeed, of all of us—but of you in particular."

Agnes partly acquiesced.

"And then," pursued Mr. Morton, he is so superior, so well informed, so sensible, and of such agreeable manners, and so much quickness and address."

"And presence of mind," said Agnes, who was thinking at that moment of his great claims upon her gratitude for having saved the life of Lacy.

"Yes, my love," continued her father, "he is a very excellent person, and the woman whom he distinguishes, may be justly proud of his attachment."

“Certainly,” replied Agnes, “for he does not strike me as being one who would easily become attached to any woman.”

“Right—quite right—just as I think of him. His affections would never be given in opposition to his better judgment; and, therefore, the woman by whom he is won, may consider herself as receiving a very high and sincere compliment.”

“Certainly—a high compliment—and, of course, the most sincere that he could pay.”

“I am glad to hear you say so,” replied Mr. Morton, gaining courage from her words, “because I know the person to whom he does pay this sincerest of all compliments; and I am happy to think that my dear daughter should be her of whom he has so high and so just an opinion. To keep you no longer in suspense, my love, Sackville has declared his attachment to you. He says, that he has long admired and loved you, and that his happiness depends entirely upon your acceptance of him.”

The countenance of Agnes fell, and she turned extremely pale. The tidings were very unacceptable; and she saw at once, that be her answer what it might, it could not fail to be attended with unpleasant consequences. She must either resign Lacy, or alienate a valuable friend. But she felt no difficulty in forming her determination; and as there was no doubt in the case, she was enabled to reply with tolerable firmness.

“I cannot contradict what I have said,” she replied: “I think any one may be proud of the attachment of Mr. Sackville; and I am sensible of the honour he has done me. It is much greater than I am conscious of deserving, and I cannot help wishing, that his attachment had been bestowed where it could have been returned, for it can never be returned by me. I can admire Mr. Sackville’s abilities—I can acknowledge his powers of pleasing

—I can regard him as a valuable friend, but I cannot feel for him any affection. I may be wrong in being so insensible to such great merits, but these are my real sentiments, and I would not deceive you by saying otherwise.”

“Take care, Agnes,” replied her father, “lest, in the meanwhile, you deceive yourself. Do not let any youthful timidity cause you to return a hasty refusal, of which you may afterwards repent. You speak very modestly, and I think too modestly of the honour he does you, and of your own unworthiness. Do not be led away by this feeling; it is an amiable one—but it may be carried to excess. You spoke of Sackville’s great superiority, as if it were a bar to your attachment. I am aware that a feeling of ease and equality is, in some degree, necessary to love; but here, I think, you judge hastily. Increased intimacy, and a change in your relative situations, will correct that sentiment of deference which he now seems to inspire. Besides, owing to the charge which your aunt committed to him, you have been accustomed to regard him as a sort of second father—but you must get rid of that impression. Sackville is still a young man—young not only in years, but in appearance and in habits—good looking, and full of vivacity. As for any attachment which you can have formed elsewhere,” pursued Mr. Morton, speaking with greater difficulty, for he was not hypocrite enough to utter with confidence what he believed to be false, “on that point I feel perfectly easy. You have never received any declaration of attachment, except from Lord Midhurst, if I mistake not—have you?” said he, looking inquiringly at his daughter.

Agnes faintly answered “No.”

“So I thought; and I have too much confidence in your sense and steadiness of principle, to believe that you would hastily resign your affections to any one, especially if he had never explicitly declared

himself; and I am sure, my dear daughter, you are not one of those weak girls who are apt to construe little foolish attentions into more than was ever meant by them."

Agnes sighed. She felt that she was in no slight danger of falling into the error which her father denounced; and that if Lacy were, indeed, the fickle person that he was represented to be, his attentions might have had very little serious meaning. But, if such were the case, how could she avow what she had begun to feel for him? To a female mind of delicacy, even under circumstances of encouragement, it must be difficult and embarrassing to acknowledge an attachment which is even avowedly returned. But to confess a passion unsupported by any proof that the attentions of the lover were otherwise than frivolous; to do this, after hearing such conduct denounced as improper by the voice of a parent, was more than Agnes had courage to undertake. Had she so dared, great as was the emergency, she might have been reasonably accused of having been wanting in self-respect, and in that sensitive and retiring modesty which is ever woman's brightest ornament.

"I am sorry," said Agnes, looking up timidly in her father's face, "I am sorry to find, that in refusing Mr. Sackville I must oppose your wishes. But I trust—if I may judge from your uniform kindness—I trust you have too great a regard for my happiness to wish to urge me to sacrifice it—and indeed—indeed I should sacrifice it entirely, if I were to do what you require of me. It is a serious thing to be united for life to one for whom one can feel no love—it would be misery without hope. I know no punishment more cruel than the lingering wretchedness of such a situation. I know you love your children—you have often said so, and your kindness has shown it—and if so, I am sure, my dear father, that you can never wish to

force me into a marriage which can end only in unhappiness."

"Certainly not, my dear Agnes, I can never *wish* to do that. But why must this marriage end in unhappiness. Is there any so great a hardship in accepting one, whom you confess to have many superior qualities; whom you have known so long and so well; and whose affection for you, no person can doubt?" Agnes answered only with a look of supplication. "There are other reasons," pursued Mr. Morton, "reasons still more weighty, which I have not yet told you. You do not know half the merits, half the claims of the man you are refusing. He has placed your father under obligations which I can never repay; he has behaved in the most noble and generous manner. Not only I, but all of you, owe him at this moment that which, if known to you, would make you fall at his feet in gratitude. Surely you cannot now refuse him?"

Agnes, who had sat during this communication with her head resting pensively on her hand, looked up once more in her father's face. "I am indeed grateful to Mr. Sackville," said she, "and wish I might be allowed to show that gratitude in some other better way. It would be a poor return for his kindnesses, (what they are I do not know, but you tell me they are great,) to give him a hand without the heart that should accompany it—how could I reward him *so*? How could I adequately fulfil the duties of a wife, if I could not return his affection? Oh, my dear father, do not urge me to that which would produce the misery of both. If you have any love for me, you will never persist in so cruel a request."

Mr. Morton started from his chair, and walked hastily across the room. "God help me!" he murmured, in broken accents. "To what am I reduced!—but the blow must fall—I had better

come to the point at once. Agnes, my dear child," said he, returning to her, and taking her hand between his own. "I do love you as tenderly as a father ever did—You do not know what I suffer; but I cannot retract—I must urge you, harsh as it may seem. It is for your sake, for all our sakes, that I do it—Agnes, Sackville, *must*, be accepted. Refuse him, and I am a lost man. Oh! you are ill! I have been too abrupt; but I will say no more."

"No, no, I am better: tell me all," and the flush of agitation gave once more a faint hue to her cheek, which but an instant before had been pale as death. Mr. Morton's agitation was scarcely less. "No," he exclaimed; "I cannot tell you: but there *is* a necessity, a terrible necessity, for your compliance. Agnes, it is in your power to ruin or to save your father."

"Oh, tell me how. If it is a debt within the reach of my fortune——"

"My dear child," interrupted Mr. Morton, colouring with shame and agitation, "it is useless to talk to me of pecuniary assistance. Supposing, for argument's sake, that my distress were of that nature, still you must remember that you are not at liberty to relieve it. Your fortune is under the control of your trustees, and, however willing Sackville may be to assist me, yet I have reason to know that Mr. Hawksworth is on that point impracticable. No, Agnes, hear me assure you, which I do in the most solemn manner, that there remains no means of securing your family from their present dreadful situation, but by your acceptance of Sackville's offer. Why should you show this great repugnance? Surely he has qualities which point him out as a valuable guide through life; and your lot with him would certainly be respectable, and I trust a happy one."

Agnes mournfully shook her head.

“Nay, my dear daughter,” said her father, “let me have the comfort of hoping so. We are in difficulties, and must make the best of them. Would to God I could have left you to your own free choice. But it cannot be. Your lot may seem a hard one, but it will be far better than mine. You will have the consolation, and it must be truly great to a disposition like yours, to know that you have saved your parents from pain and sorrow.”

“Shame!” exclaimed Agnes.

“Ay, child, misfortune is shame in the eye of society—and that I, who have held my head so high—that I, should—oh, it would drive me mad. Agnes! Agnes! if you have ever felt compassion, save me from that which would be worse than death. I entreat, I implore you—yes, even on my knees;” and he fell at her feet, and grasped her cold trembling hands, with all the energy of despair. “Look at me, my child, ay, look at me, and then judge of what I feel. Think, that by one single word, you can raise me from this abyss of misery. Think, that not I alone, but all of us are to be doomed or saved, by your decision—that unless you relent, the mother that bore you, may be forced to languish out the remainder of her days in obscurity and sorrow, and that you will see a father, who has ever loved you as his life, made for your sake, a by-word, and driven from the dwelling of his parents, houseless, and pennyless, into a wide unfeeling world.”

Agnes almost fainting with agitation, was overcome by an appeal made with such earnestness, and so calculated to wring almost to agony, her naturally acute and tender feelings. Bewildered with the shock of her novel situation, and half insensible with grief, she bowed her head towards her father, who was still kneeling by her side, and in a feeble voice uttered the words, “I will consent.” He made no reply, but clasped her in gratitude to

his bosom. Her tears until this moment, had been repressed by the workings of astonishment and terror. But a tenderer emotion now gave them vent, and she wept upon her father's shoulder. Terrible and afflicting as was the decision she had made, she felt relieved by having made it, and even experienced a temporary glow of pleasure and satisfaction, from the reflection, that by this sacrifice of her own happiness, she had soothed the sufferings of an imploring parent.

Neither spoke for some time, for tears had also choked *his* utterance. When at length they did speak, it was at first in indistinct and broken sentences, expressive of his gratitude, and her resignation. They soon grew calmer, and could talk in a composed and steady tone, of those arrangements which had so severely agitated them; and Agnes, with a firmness at which she was herself surprised, could again express her willingness to accept the proposals of Sackville. She only entreated that time might be allowed her, that their union might be deferred, if possible, for a year, and that her father would make with Sackville, on that point, as favourable terms as he could.

CHAPTER XIX.

Oh, hard it is that fondness to sustain,
And struggle not to feel averse in vain;
But harder still the heart's recoil to bear,
And hide from one, perhaps another there.

BYRON.

MR. MORTON, after taking a grateful and affectionate leave of his daughter, and promising to strive in every thing to consult her happiness, and urge a delay as strongly as he durst, went to communicate the intelligence to Sackville. Without preface or circumlocution, he entered at once into the subject, and told his errand in few words.

“She consents,” said he, “but upon conditions.”

Sackville took no notice of the latter words, but grasping his hand, expressed, in warm and well-chosen terms, the happiness which he received from such an answer. Mr. Morton, encouraged by his manner, and stimulated by the feelings of a father, eager to secure, in some degree, the happiness of a daughter who had sacrificed so much for his sake, again repeated, in a firm tone, that his daughter's acquiescence was merely conditional. Sackville bowed with a smile of conscious security, and stood silently expecting the communication of the stipulated conditions.

Mr. Morton then told them, and Sackville was relieved, by hearing that they contained only a request for postponement, from which, as decay of affection was no consideration with him, he appre-

hended little danger. He even thought that time might have a beneficial effect, and that Agnes might become less averse to the marriage, and might view it at length as a thing of course, after having been long accustomed to his addresses. Therefore, finding Mr. Morton very urgent upon the minor article of time, he, after a proper show of resistance, and profession of impatience for the happy event, consented that the ceremony should be deferred till the June of the ensuing year. He required, however, that the marriage should take place between that month and September, at latest; and the consequences of an infringement of this agreement, though not expressed, were sufficiently implied to render them very imperative. He had no wish that their engagement should remain a secret; he had rather, if Agnes approved, that it should be immediately made known. The consent of Mr. Hawksworth, he had no doubt, could easily be obtained, and the long time which would intervene between the announcement of the marriage and its celebration, could always be satisfactorily explained to the world, on the ground of legal delays. Meanwhile, it was not his wish that Agnes should go less into society than before, or that her engagement with him should produce any change in her habits. She was still very young, and he thought it would be unreasonable to seclude her from those scenes of gaiety which she was so calculated to adorn. After many liberal sentiments of this kind, expressed in the most winning manner, he requested an interview with Agnes; but declared that however eager to see her, yet, as *his* wishes should always bend to *hers*, he would await her leisure, and not press for an immediate interview while her spirits were yet agitated by the recent announcement.

Mr. Morton then quitted him, to report to his daughter what had passed. He informed her of

Sackville's wish to see her, and his willingness to await her leisure, and repeated as nearly as he could, the well-chosen terms, in which the message was couched. Agnes smiled mournfully at the deceitful profession of subservience to her will, yet could not but feel obliged by the delicacy of his attention.

"I can have no objection," said she, "to receive Mr. Sackville as soon as he may choose to see me. I hope I am equal to the effort—I should gain no additional courage by delay, and therefore wish that our first meeting should be over."

"Since such is your wish," said Mr. Morton, "I will go immediately and bring him: but first, let me earnestly entreat you, on no earthly consideration, to endeavour, in your conference with him, to retract that promise which you have made: consider yourself irrevocably bound to him, and remember that the fate of your parents depends upon your compliance."

Agnes promised strict obedience; and Mr. Morton repaired once more in quest of his intended son-in-law, leaving Agnes in a painful state of suspense, and listening with a beating heart, for the awful sound of approaching footsteps. Minutes, which seemed hours to her apprehension, had slowly elapsed, when at length the door was gently opened, and Sackville entered the room. Agnes could not look at him—but turned away her head, and directed her eyes she knew not where, for she saw nothing. It was a dreadful moment—her heart beat quicker than before—respiration almost failed—sight and hearing grew imperfect—all sense of external objects seemed to be leaving her, and she thought herself on the point of fainting. She was hardly conscious of his presence, till she perceived that somebody was seated near her, that the hand which hung cold and motionless by her side,

was gently taken, and that a voice was expressing in its softest accents—she knew not what: but she was alive to the necessity of rousing herself to a consciousness of what he said; and the effort was soon made.

It was long before she had any other task than that of listening; for Sackville, who saw her agitation, and wished to give her time to recover; without pressing for any confirmation of that consent which he assumed to be irrevocably granted, poured forth, with an eloquence which, under other circumstances, would have been irresistible, all that the most devoted attachment could prompt to the most disinterested of suitors. So amiable, so submissive did he seem, so utterly dependent on her will, that Agnes, while she listened, was almost deceived into a temporary belief of her power over him, and meditated, for an instant, to throw herself upon his compassion, avow that her affections were placed elsewhere, and deprecate the impending punishment which it was in his power to inflict upon her father.

But she had been long and intimately acquainted with Sackville, and knew too well with whom she had to deal; and the rising reflection on the probable uselessness of such an appeal, together with the remembrance of her father's injunction, dispelled the transitory hope.

Sackville adverted with delicacy and judgment to her wish that their nuptials should be deferred; and without seeming to regard such a wish as any proof of the weakness of her affection for him, remarked how natural it was that a very young person should look forward with some alarm to the prospect of quitting the home of her parents. "But in this case, my dear Agnes," said he, "I hope these evils will be lightened to a greater degree than they are in the case of the generality of

young brides. You have had the advantage of knowing me well before you have committed your happiness to my care; and intimacy, and the situation which I have held, have already given me, in some degree, the rights of a protector. You will also be removed to no strange house; but one to which I am sure you are much attached, where you passed so many happy years under the care of my excellent friend, your dear aunt, by whose kindness it is now mine."

He then proceeded with much feeling to strike the tender chord which these associations were likely to affect; and artfully connecting himself with the scenes of her childhood, and the memory of her benefactress, he soon succeeded, through the medium of her early affections, in awakening a more tender regard towards himself than she would previously have allowed to be possible. Her mind was agitated with various emotions; affectionate regret for her departed aunt, and vivid recollections of early pleasures; then appeared Sackville in numerous contrasted lights—the former friend of a dear relation—the menacer of a father's happiness—once her firm and valued adviser, to whom in default of parental aid, she would have looked for support—now her suiter, by compulsion, ruining with remorseless selfishness all her best hopes of earthly happiness: but feeling acutely as she did the extent of the injury which Sackville had inflicted, and viewing his conduct in its full enormity, she could not avoid being soothed by his manner, and confessed to herself that the evils of her situation were really lessened by the amiable and seductive colouring which his flattering tongue could lend to every circumstance of their intended union. She knew not how to make an ungracious reply to an address so fraught with every thing that could disarm displeasure, and timidly

said, that she was willing to conform to his directions.

"If I must quarrel with any thing," said Sackville, with one of his most engaging smiles, "it shall be with the obedient tone of that answer. It was rather like an address to a guardian. However, if you wish me once more to be somewhat authoritative before I lay down my office, I will exercise a little gentle tyranny upon you, and request that you will partake of society as freely as if we were not engaged, and that you will not allow me to be any restraint upon your actions. No: I will not be thanked by you—it is the world at large that is my debtor—and they, indeed, have need to thank me for not depriving them of you, who are so great an ornament and acquisition wherever you appear. To come to particulars—I hope I may accompany you to the Rodborough's ball on Wednesday. It will give me pleasure to see you go into society the same as before: I love to have you seen and admired, and to be myself the witness of it; and that is a pleasure which I hope you are too kind to deny me."

Agnes professed, with truth, to feel very little inclination for society, and under present circumstances would willingly have declined the ball at Westcourt; but as he seemed to wish that she should not forego it, she had no other course than to comply. His object in pressing this point was twofold: first, to render his engagement generally known and acknowledged; and secondly, to give to his own conduct an air of liberality, and to avoid the appearance of timidity and concealment.

After the previous discussion, Sackville, wishing to wean her mind from all harassing thoughts, led her insensibly into cheerful conversation upon subjects less immediately connected with their union. Her confidence and tranquillity were gradually restored; and this interview, the purport of which

was so cruelly afflicting, and which, at its commencement, had been attended with such a painful excess of agitation, ended at length with a composure on the part of Agnes, which, when she retired to muse over the past in solitude, she felt to be almost unaccountable.

CHAPTER XX.

I like not fair terms and a villain's mind.

Merchant of Venice.

WE must now return to fill up a slight chasm in the history of the proceedings of Sackville, and relate what passed between the time of his quitting Lacy Park on the preceding day, and his appearance at the dinner-table at Dodswell.

After quitting the Lacys, he proceeded to a small neighbouring town, and stopped at a house situated in the outskirts, at which resided the person already introduced to our readers, by the name of Richard Allen. This person was one whom it was difficult to designate very briefly. He called himself a land surveyor, in addition to which, and the occasional occupation of a valuer of tithes, he was agent to one or two estates, acted sometimes as an auctioneer, farmed, speculated in building, and made money in more ways than his neighbours were generally acquainted with. He had begun life inauspiciously, as clerk in a bank which failed. He afterwards obtained the more lucrative situation of justice's clerk, in a populous district, where, in the course of a dozen years, he picked up some law and a good deal of money. He was supposed to be in good circumstances, and, as his wealth had flowed from various sources, nobody knew exactly how, was generally pronounced to be "a bit of a rogue."

On this point, nobody was much mistaken; and if the world erred, it was only with respect to the

quantum of his knavery, which was rated, except by *one* person, very much below the truth. Nobody, however, wished to think more severely of him than was necessary, for he was a useful person, and had a civil, cheerful, popular manner, which equally recommended him to high and low; and however his neighbours might mentally consign him to eventual perdition, they would, at the same time, internally confess that they could "better spare a better man."

Allen had not the sullen scowl, or designing sneer of your open villains, who carry a caution in their faces to counteract their schemes. He was a little, busy, brisk, obliging man; all gaiety, civility, and seeming candour, who had his ready laugh and joke for every one, who was the frequent referee in petty disputes, the boon companion of the neighbouring farmers, the leading wag in their convivial meetings, and who could sing a comic song at a benefit club feast, better than any man in the Hundred.

It was at the door of this person that Sackville alighted, on the day above-mentioned, and was ushered, by the bowing, smiling master of the mansion, into a small back-room, furnished with a clerk's desk, various dusty lackered boxes, deeds, plans, and advertisements of sales. There was a good deal of eager attention on the part of Allen, through which an observant eye might perhaps have detected some indications of secret uneasiness.—"I am quite glad you are come, Mr. Sackville," said he, bustling meanwhile about the room, and putting things out of his visiter's way, "for I knew you would be wanting to see me—and I was thinking of going over to you—and I have made out the valuation—and——"

"Very good," interrupted Sackville—"I will look at that some other time—I am come to speak to you upon other business now."

Allen bowed and looked grave: there was something in Sackville's tone that jarred unpleasantly on his ear; and he began to be officiously active in taking charge of his hat and whip, and apologizing for the disordered state of the apartment.

"Are we secure from being overheard?" said Sackville. "I ask for your sake as well as mine."

Allen assured him that they were.

"Very well," pursued the former, "then now to business. Have you got me the list of Mr. Morton's debts?"

"I have, Sir," said Allen, and gave him a paper.

"Are these all?"

"All, I believe, Sir. We have not been able to discover any other bond debts; and the mortgages specified over the leaf, comprise all the landed property that he is known to have. I myself, am creditor for all the sums lent on bond that are marked with red ink, and am mortgagee of the Draycot Magna, and Shawley farms, and also the Dodswell domain."

"You have not allowed my name to appear?"

"No, Sir, no—I have kept all close—I believe you will find that I have done every thing quite correct according to your directions."

"I am satisfied," said Sackville: "you have acquitted yourself extremely well; and now I have other plans in which I shall look for your assistance."

"You may command me, Sir," said Allen.

"Yes," replied Sackville, in a peculiar tone, "I know I may—I will now tell you shortly what I want you to do—I wish Mr. Morton to be made to understand that I am his principal creditor, having made myself such, in order to save him from being pressed by you, when you were much in want of money yourself; and that I accordingly received from you an assignment of some of his bond debts and mortgages, on giving you my own bond to their

full amount; that delicacy prevented my mentioning the circumstance to Mr. Morton at the time; and that my own unforeseen and pressing embarrassments alone, could now have forced me to disclose it. Do you understand?"

"Completely, Sir: though I don't know what your reasons are."

"Never mind them," pursued Sackville, with a smile. "Now hear the steps which I wish you to take. In the first place, you must make a regular assignment to me of Mr. Morton's bonds to you, and also of the mortgages, for which I will give you my own bond, which, as you know, is perfectly good security. Next, I wish you to take an early opportunity of acquainting Mr. Morton of the state of affairs between us. At some future time we can, if we like it, easily re-transfer our separate securities, and there the transaction between us will terminate."

Allen stared, and smiled a hesitating acquiescence to this sweeping and novel mode of transacting business.

"And now, Allen," continued Sackville, "you are to act the character, not only of a creditor, but of a merciless one. With this view, I will write a letter as from yourself to me, dated about ten days back, pressing for immediate payment. This you shall copy while I am here, and I will take it with me to Dodswell, and show it to Mr. Morton. You can fold it up, and seal it; and we can imitate the postmark sufficiently well for our purpose. You are no bad hand at an imitation."

Allen gave an uneasy smile, and hastily placed before Sackville the materials for writing. The letter was then written by Sackville; copied by Allen in the proper form; directed, sealed, the seal broken, the letter creased and soiled, and a fac simile of the postmark ingeniously executed on the cover.

“And now, Allen,” pursued Sackville, “I will tell you what, in addition to all this, I mean to represent to Mr. Morton. I shall tell him, that having heard a report, which you are rather inclined to disbelieve, of my being engaged to marry Miss Morton, you are willing to suspend your demand for immediate payment of the debt I owe you, only on condition of my being able, within a week from this day, to produce to you a written paper from Mr. Morton, certifying the truth of such a report.”

Allen looked very grave, and did not seem to like the proposal. “I beg your pardon, Sir,” said he, “for presuming to object; but I think that if I were to make such a stipulation, I should take a great deal too much upon myself; and I don’t quite like to be represented in such a light to Mr. Morton. I think it would end in a disagreement.”

“Why, Allen!” said Sackville, with a scornful laugh, “are you afraid of quarrelling with your debtor? with the man that lies so utterly at your mercy?”

“But, Mr. Sackville, you forget that the debts are to pass in your name.”

“Yes, but I have made you my creditor for the full amount; and unless I can marry Miss Morton, you may have a very reasonable doubt that I shall not be able to discharge my debt to you. As for a quarrel with Mr. Morton, never dream of it. I trust to your address to make the matter easy to his feelings. You will find him slow to take offence.”

“It may be so, Sir,” rejoined Allen, with a dogged air of bluntness and simplicity; but I don’t see how I am to be the better for these schemes.”

“As for that, Allen, though no immediate benefit may accrue to you, yet, as I am disposed to stand your friend, whatever is for my advantage, must ultimately be for yours. Besides, it is al-

ways my intention to reward you handsomely for your trouble; and though you may not like to make out any account of the time expended in these secret services, you shall find me a liberal task master. As an earnest of my good intentions, I beg you to accept this draft in advance."

Allen took the proffered paper with a bow of acknowledgment, but still seemed reluctant to undertake the part that was pressed upon him; pleaded his ignorance of the ultimate object proposed, and his fears, lest by proceeding in the dark, he should bring himself into some unpleasant situation.

"You *have* brought yourself into an unpleasant situation," replied Sackville, his countenance darkening as he spoke, "a situation which leaves you no choice, but to obey. I need not remind you that you are speaking to the man that can hang you. The circumstances of the forged draft can hardly have escaped your recollection. I do not, however, wish unnecessarily to recal things that are past; I should not have done so if it had not been for these symptoms of hesitation. As for any difficulties into which you can be brought, you are too clever a fellow to be easily entangled; and I can hardly suppose that you would affect any squeamishness before me; we know each other too well. It would be perfectly ridiculous. You are too wise to play so foolish a part. As for your wish to know my motives, and whole plan of operation, it is a very excusable piece of curiosity, which it is quite needless for me to gratify. It is a good maxim through life, Allen, never to tell more than is necessary."

"Perhaps it may, Mr. Sackville," replied Allen; "but when a person is anxious to do the best he can for a gentleman, he naturally likes to be trusted. And now, Sir, if you please, I'll just tell you

that it was only the wish of being trusted, that made me ask you any thing about it. I know your plans and your reasons, Sir, just as well as if you had explained them. It is true, Sir, and I will convince you of it. You want to marry Miss Morton. You have as good as told me that yourself; but that is not all. You have just found out, that if you don't marry her yourself, there is another that will, and that other is Mr. Lacy."

"And how did you find out that?" cried Sackville, after a short pause of surprise. "I did not know, Allen, that love affairs were in your line."

"Few things come amiss to me, Sir," replied Allen with a laugh. "I always go about with my ears and eyes open, and as I am free in my talk to other people, they are always the same to me. I believe, Sir, I know pretty well what is passing in most neighbouring families—not that I mean to boast of it—one cannot help hearing a little, Sir. Servants know more than their masters suppose, and they will talk, Sir, they will talk."

"You are a clever spy," said Sackville, with a smile; then after a short time spent in rumination, "Your information," he resumed, "may, for aught I know, be very correct with respect to the intentions of Mr. Lacy; but I must lay my positive injunctions upon you, never from henceforth to mention them. As his marriage with Miss Morton, is, for many reasons, never likely to take place, the less that is said of it the better. You will offend me very much by not observing strict silence on the subject. You perhaps know, that the Mortons and Lacys have only very lately begun to be friendly after many years of coldness. Now, Allen, I have no scruple in saying to you, that under the present circumstances it would be much better for all parties that they should be upon the same cool terms as formerly."

"I understand you, Sir," said Allen.

"Young Lacy," pursued Sackville, "led the way to reconciliation, and got into favour by an act of civility to Lord Rodborough. Perhaps you know that the refusal of the Bloxwich estate was offered to Lord Rodborough by Sir William Lacy, in the idea of its being a greater object to Lord R. than to himself."

"I do, Sir," replied Allen; "and if you will be so good as to promise me never to mention, nor even hint what I am going to say, I will tell you something about that property."

"You may rely upon me," said Sackville.

"Well, then, Sir," lowering his voice, "the title is not worth *that*," snapping his fingers as he spoke.

"Have you known this long?"

"Yes, Sir, some time."

"And have you ever told it in confidence to any but me?"

"To none but you, Sir," replied Allen.

Sackville remained silent for several minutes, while his countenance underwent frequent changes, as if the difficulties and advantages of some new project, were alternately passing in review before him.

"Have you ever had much to do with Sir William Lacy?" was his first question, after a long silence.

"Yes, Sir; I have often been employed by him in one way or other; and know him very well."

"And what do you think of him?" asked Sackville.

"Why, Sir, he is a pleasant gentleman to talk to; and good-humoured, and free spoken, and one that likes to have his joke; but I don't think, somehow, that he is a clever hand at business. He is too flighty, too fond of talking of this thing, or

that thing, or any thing that comes into his head; and he is mortally careless about his papers, and rather short of memory."

"The sort of man," pursued Sackville, "that would not remember whether you had told him a thing or not, and who, if you wrote to him a letter of business, probably would not read it through."

"Likely enough, Sir, by what I have seen of him."

"Well now, Allen, it strikes me that from your long acquaintance with him, having out of compliment offered him the first refusal of this estate, you might, by possibility, also think proper to give him a hint about the defectiveness of the title."

"I never did, I assure you, Sir."

"Well, well; but you might have done so; and if you had, Sir William might have totally forgotten it."

"Possibly, Sir," was Allen's answer.

"You wrote to him, I believe, on the subject?"

"I did, Sir."

"Was your letter a long one?"

"Yes: I had many other things to mention, besides the Bloxwich business."

"So much the better. Now, Allen," pursued Sackville, "this letter he has destroyed. I made that discovery this morning at Lacy Park. The Bloxwich property happened accidentally to be mentioned, and he said he would have shown me your letter about it, if he had not unluckily burnt it."

"Well, Sir?" said Allen, rather drily.

"Oh, you shall soon be enlightened," continued Sackville. "I am coming rapidly to the point. Here is a long letter on business, written to a man notoriously inattentive, which letter he has since destroyed. Do you suppose he remembered half of it?"

“I should think not.”

“Or could recollect what was or was not in the letter?”

Allen repeated his negative.

“Would he then be able to contradict a positive assertion respecting the contents of that letter? I say, for instance, that he is told that the letter which he destroyed, contained a hint respecting the defective title of the Bloxwich property, would he be able to deny it? or, not having the letter, could he rebut the assertion?”

“I should think not,” replied Allen.

“I am glad that such is your opinion,” resumed Sackville; “because this is the representation which, upon some favourable opportunity, I shall request you to make to Mr. Morton. I wish him to be led to think that Sir William Lacy had learned from you that the Bloxwich estate was not a desirable purchase. Nay, man, don’t pretend to remonstrate: it must be done; you know that I have the means to enforce obedience, and am not the person to be trifled with,” and, as he said these words, he directed towards the hesitating Allen, a short, stern, intimidating glance, which distinctly painted to his helpless tool the terrible ruthlessness with which he could exercise his power if irritated by resistance.

Allen cowered, abashed and trembling, beneath the influence of that glance.

“Well, Mr. Sackville,” said he, with a deprecating shrug, “it is not for such as me to argue and advise; but it is a strange business, and, to tell you my mind, I don’t at all like it. I shall offend a great many people, and get into all sorts of trouble. There are my employers for the Bloxwich property—they’ll think it very strange in me to go and let out that secret about the title, to the first person it is offered to. Then there is Sir William

Lacy: I shall lose his favour, I am pretty sure, by going and telling lies about him. My Lord Rodborough will be angry that I didn't tell him as well as Sir William. And what is it all for? To breed dissensions between neighbours! A pretty employment for a man of my character!"

"*Your* character! Come, come, Allen! that must have been a slip of the tongue, or you forgot, perhaps, who you were talking to. Never fear, I'll carry you through; and as for solid recompense, you shall not want that, my *honest* fellow. Why, you are actually growing conscientious! It is a pity I am so pressed for time, or I would have let you carry on the joke. Breeding dissensions between neighbours! and such neighbours! such old and attached friends! Oh, it is really too atrocious. However, Allen, joking apart, the thing positively must be done. The 'when' and the 'how' shall be told you hereafter. And now, I believe, I have said all that was necessary, and I shall depend upon your strict observance," and then, with a good-humoured smile, and a gracious inquiry after Allen's family, Sackville took up his hat and departed.

It will have appeared from the preceding dialogue, that Sackville had the means of exercising a strong control over Allen. He had in his possession a draft which Allen had forged in the name of Mrs. Denham, when in want of money several years ago. Mrs. Denham, out of a kind but mistaken spirit of lenity, had forborne to prosecute; but at the same time had, very inconsistently, kept both the forgery, and written confirmatory proofs of it, and they were found among her papers at the time of her death. Mrs. Denham, during her last illness, informed Sackville confidentially of this circumstance, and requested that the paper, if found, might be immediately destroyed, and that Allen might be al-

lowed to escape with a suitable admonition. On the death of this lady the paper passed into the hands of Sackville, who was left her executor and residuary legatee. How far he had complied with her dying injunctions our readers have already seen.

CHAPTER XXI.

Sweet pliability of man's spirit that can, at once, surrender itself to illusions, which cheat expectation, and sorrow of their weary moments!

STERNE.

WE must now return to Herbert Lacy, whom we shall find looking forward, with the joyous anticipation of prosperous love, to the ball at Westcourt on the ensuing Wednesday, where he felt assured that he should again meet Agnes. His impatience, however, was not to be controlled, even by this promise of a speedy meeting; and on the Monday he rode over to call at Dodswell. Unluckily every body was denied to him; and, therefore, the ball was still the goal to which his ardent hopes must be directed.

At length, Wednesday evening arrived, and a very short time seemed now to intervene between him and happiness. Lady Lacy had put in requisition the family diamonds; and, attired to the complete satisfaction of herself and maid, proceeded to require a decided answer from her vacillating husband. Sir William had for many days been grumbling at intervals about the approaching ball, and now at length, when pressed for a decision, sturdily determined not to go.

"I think you had better," said Lady Lacy.

"Why?" said Sir William, very drily.

"Why?" oh—why—because I think you will like it."

"Thank you, my dear, but I am sure I shall not. Have you any other reason?"

"Yes, many; in the first place, I think you should go, because you ought."

"‘Should’ and ‘ought’ are equivalent terms; therefore your position is, that I ought to go because I ought. Quite incontrovertible; and why ought I?"

"Now, my dear Sir William, that is so tiresome! I wish you would not plague me with your reasons. You know very well that it is right you should go, because they asked us, and it would not look civil not to go; and if you went it would please Lord Rodborough."

"My dear Lady Lacy, Lord Rodborough is not so easily pleased as you imagine."

"I don't know how that may be, but I know that you have no good excuse for staying away."

"Yes; I am labouring under an indisposition—to go," he added, in a whisper.

"You don't mean that you are ill?"

"Why not? Surely a man in my station may be allowed to have a cold."

"But, Sir William, you have no cold—I cannot say *that*—it would not be true."

"That is my concern, not yours. You can say I told you I had a cold; and people will only respect you the more for taking your husband's word so easily."

Lady Lacy looked rather baffled; but returned once more to the charge. "I think," said she, "if I go, you should."

"That, my dear, is what logicians call a *non sequitur*. Our cases are very different. For me to appear at the Westcourt ball would be neither an advantage to others, nor a pleasure to myself: but every body knows that you must go to show your jewels, and chaperon Herbert."

“Chaperon Herbert! Nonsense, Sir William! Herbert can chaperon himself. However, I see there is no use in talking—if you won’t, you won’t—that’s plain; only I really wish you would, because people will think it strange to see me alone; I shall look so odd without you!”

“My dear, you do yourself an injustice; I have no doubt you will look quite as well as your neighbours. As for the practice of a wife appearing alone in public, console yourself with the reflection, that it is both frequent and fashionable.” Sir William was evidently impracticable; and, by Herbert’s advice, Lady Lacy forbore all further entreaty, and made up her mind to go without him.

At length the carriage was at the door, and Herbert naturally impatient to be gone. Sir William took him aside before parting.

“Herbert,” he, said with a good-humoured smile, “let me, once more, before you go into the inflammatory atmosphere of a ball-room, temper your ardour with a little of my cool discretion. Beware of making a declaration. Dance with her, and talk to her as much as you please, but on no account commit yourself. You can lose nothing by delay. Your attachment, if of the true kind, will only grow the stronger—if not, it cannot be such as would ensure the prospect of happiness in marriage. And now, good night—go, and be happy.”

It seemed impossible to Herbert, at that joyful moment, that such an injunction should fail to be accomplished; and the conviction increased in force as he arrived within sight of the stately mansion of Westcourt, which, with the lights gleaming through the darkness from the numerous windows of the suite, and from the moving lines of carriages, which were now assembling in considerable numbers, presented a very brilliant spectacle.

The ball of this night was one of those fêtes by which Lord Rodborough at once gratified his love of display, upheld his consequence, contrived for a considerable time to fill the heads of his neighbours, and dispensed, at an easy rate, that extensive hospitality which, though so commendable in his situation, he was much averse to the more effectual mode of paying off by small instalments. The ball had been talked of for two months already, and the youthful bosoms of many who were included in the favoured list had long beat high with expectation. The preparations had been declared to exceed belief. Report said, that the grand suite was to be newly furnished for the occasion; that men from Gillows' had come down for that purpose; and extra buildings had been erected for the reception of the horses and carriages. Herein, however, was found to be some mistake; as no men had arrived from Gillows', or had ever been sent for; and the report of the preparation of additional stabling was found to have originated in the erection of a new deer-house. Nevertheless, the ball was certainly to be one of the best that ever that country had been blessed with. There was to be a royal duke—*that* was certain, though it was not known which; several foreigners of the first distinction; a large assortment of nobility from distant countries; and half-a-dozen persons of fashionable notoriety to be stared at by the —shire natives: the band was to consist of a select detachment from the Almack's orchestra, headed by Colinet; and Gunter, with half his shop at his back, was to come down in person to prepare the supper; plate was to be displayed in unexampled profusion; and the tables were to groan under the united services of several distinguished friends.

Numerous were the engagements which had been made and unmade with reference to this great event;

and most of the houses within ten miles of Westcourt, were to be filled for the occasion, the Lacys being almost the only exception to the general spirit of accommodating hospitality.

Lady Lacy and Herbert were rather early, but found several persons assembled. A very large party was staying in the house, and consequently the rooms did not present that meagre promise of gaiety which is generally held out to early arrivars at a ball. The *coup d'œil* was very good. The gallery, a long and handsome room, was appropriated to dancing, and was brilliantly illuminated by an immense lamp, procured for the occasion, the ponderous bulk of which, as it hung suspended over the heads of the visitors, caused some of the more apprehensive seniors to turn rather an anxious eye towards the massy chain by which it was upheld. In the anti-room to the gallery was a considerable assemblage of persons, and amongst them, standing near the door, was Lady Rodborough, stationed ready to receive her visitors, and talking at intervals to Mr. Bellasys, one of those favoured dangles who were honoured with her public notice, a gentleman of good face, figure and address, who, without any great aid from wealth, talents, or connexions, had, by dint of thinking well of himself, induced many others to be of the same opinion.

It would have been an amusing study to one who had nothing else to engage his attention, to observe with what dexterous discrimination her ladyship performed the duties of reception; how, without any stately airs of coldness, or the slightest departure from cheerful civility, she could mark and convey to the initiated by-standers of her particular set, her estimation of the respective pretensions of the passing visitors; and, at the same time, preserve a full assertion of her own superior conse-

quence in the calm air with which she saw the united gentility of the county pass in review before her.

Her reception of Lady Lacy was very satisfactory; considering the slightness of their acquaintance it was perhaps more full of *empressement* than could have been expected; and showed, that Lady Rodborough had taken a higher estimate of the importance of the Lacy family, than the generality of their neighbours did, and was conscious of those claims which they themselves were so backward in asserting. Lady Lacy lost no time in acquitting herself of an apology for Sir William, who, she guardedly said, “did not *feel himself* well enough to come out.”

Lady Rodborough was “very sorry,” and smiled and bowed her off as expeditiously as she could; and then turned to say a few words to Herbert, to tell him that she had heard of him at Huntley, and to talk a little about the Applebys, who, she said, were staying at Dodswell, and were to come with the Morton party. This explained to Lacy that Agnes was not yet arrived; and his eyes, which had been anxiously wandering in quest of her, became more quiescent from that moment.

Fresh arrivals soon warned him not to engross many minutes of Lady Rodborough’s valuable attention, and he moved onward to pay his respects to the Ladies Jane and Mary Sedley. From these young ladies his reception was very favourable. Their father, who had lately received a good report of the state of Sir William Lacy’s circumstances, and had discovered Herbert to be the only son, had given them to understand, that he was a person to whom they might venture to be gracious; and Herbert now received, in their present treatment of him, the benefit of this intimation.

Lord Rodborough had not yet accosted him. He

was sitting on a sofa in the gallery, making himself agreeable to a foreign princess, and at the same time repressing the caresses of an Italian greyhound, and playing with the light flowing curly locks of his youngest daughter, a child of about six years old. He had studied all modes of appearing with effect, and had decided in his own mind, that to be stately was *mauvais ton*, and a state device for assuming consequence; and that nothing would have a better air than to seem indifferent to his own splendour, to sink as much as possible the character of the host, leave the cares of reception to Lady Rodborough, and lounge about the house, and be carelessly good-humoured, and negligently civil to all who might chance to fall in his way.

So far was decided; but this was not sufficient. The pursuance of this line of conduct alone, could not have distinguished him from his guests; whereas, though his ostensible object, like theirs, was only to amuse himself, it was necessary that he should be much more at home, than any of them in common propriety ought to be. Any little sprain or accident, that would have enabled him to dispense with the strict formalities of an evening dress, or to wear a sling, or a slashed sleeve, or to attire himself in any other interesting manner, would have been very convenient. But as not even gout would come to his aid, and allow him to let the world see, that he was conscious of being in his own house, he was obliged to have recourse to other methods of producing a sensation. It struck him that a display of parental fondness, would form a very interesting and softening contrast with the more awful points of his character: and, accordingly, his youngest daughter, a beautiful child, who was like her father, and had been indulged into being very fond of him, was kept

up beyond her usual hours, that she might hang about him, attract the attention of the ladies, be a pretty play-thing when he had nothing else to do, and a convenient excuse for any inattention to his less distinguished guests, of which he might think proper to be guilty.

CHAPTER XXII.

From the top of all my trust,
Mishap hath throwen me in the dust.

SIR T. WYATT.

MEANWHILE, the minutes rolled on, the crowd poured in, and the contents of the overflowing anti-room, now half filled the spacious gallery. The band commenced an enlivening air; young ladies and gentlemen began to file off from the sides to the centre; sundry arrangements seemed to be made, in which was chiefly audible, the word "*vis-à-vis*:" there was a momentary crowd, and movement, and confusion; when all at once, order sprung up, like the world out of chaos, from this seeming irregularity; and as the chaperons fell back, a large proportion of the younger part of the assembly, were seen to be symmetrically arranged in several regular hollow squares: a slight double clap of the hand was heard: the band struck up, and the ball was begun.

A quadrille was ended, and the Mortons were not come; another was begun, and they were still absent; and Herbert, who was vexed at their non-appearance, could not help wondering to his partner, Lady Mary Sedley, what could make them so very late.

"I don't know," said the young lady, in a tone, which also implied that neither did she care. "I suppose it is only Lady Louisa taking time to make up her mind to be imprudent and come out. Poor

Lady Loo! What a pity she can never fancy herself quite well! Whenever you ask her how she does? she says, invariably, "thank you, better." I cannot understand how she happens to be always improving, and never as well as other people. She must have had a large stock of illness to begin with."

Herbert next ventured to mention Agnes, and to sound Lady Mary's opinion of her: but the lady did not seem interested in the subject, merely said she was a nice girl, and after finding out a likeness for her, which Herbert could not feel to be complimentary, was glad to turn the conversation to some good mark for ridicule. Herbert unintentionally assisted her in this respect, by asking, if she knew the Applebys.

"Oh, perfectly," was her answer. "You must not quiz them to me, Mr. Lacy, for they are somehow or other related to us. Lady Appleby always calls us cousins. What a dear, civil creature she is! She says pretty things to one, that sound as if they had been taken, word for word, out of a note of congratulation. And then what a sprightly person *he* is! I see them now—there he stands, pitying himself for some piece of good fortune."

"Were not they to come from Dodswell?"

"Yes," said Lady Mary, "and I suppose the Mortons are come too."

Herbert looked eagerly around him, and at that moment, the crowd opening, enabled him to see the object of all his solicitude. She was standing near the entrance to the ball-room, leaning on the arm of Sackville, who was talking to Lady Rodborough. She looked grave, and rather pale; but Herbert was disposed to attribute this to the glare of the lamps, and thought her as beautiful as ever. He saw her eye directed to the place where he was, and he thought she recognized him; but this

might be a mistake, for she betrayed no signs of recognition, and immediately looked another way. Herbert tried to catch her eye, but in vain. She soon retired to a seat, where she was screened from his view, by the standers in front; and Herbert was obliged to resign all hopes of seeing more of her, till he had made his bow to Lady Mary.

Scarcely had he conducted that lady to a seat, than he saw Mr. Morton near him. He thought he appeared unwilling to accost him, sidled off as he approached, and persisted in looking another way, till he could no longer refrain from acknowledging Herbert's address. When he did, it was rather uneasily. He said a few common-place things about the ball; inquired after Sir William; regretted not having been at home, when Lacy called on the Monday; and then seemed glad to break off the conference, by turning to talk to another of his acquaintance. His manner was evidently changed from what it was when they met last; and Herbert was uneasy at the circumstance.

Unconscious how he could have given offence, he was the more desirous of trying what would be his reception from Agnes. He soon found her: she was seated, and Sackville by her side. She seemed to be conscious of his approach, but could not look at him; turning still more pale, cast down her eyes, and tried to seem attentive to what was said by the Miss Tyrwhitts, who were sitting on the other side of her. They were very ineligible witnesses for this meeting, having made good use of their eyes at Huntley, and being at least suspicious, if not certain, that Agnes and Lacy were mutually attached. Sackville comprehended all the unpleasantness of the situation in which Agnes was placed. He saw her agitation, and wishing to give her time for recovery, drew off the attention of Lacy, by addressing him first himself.

"I was sorry to miss you," said he, "on Monday. I had ridden out not long before you called."

He then inquired after Sir William and Lady Lacy, and by the time Herbert had answered his questions, Agnes could receive him with tolerable composure. Her manner on his first approach, had startled and perplexed him, and her present air, though much improved in composure, was still grave and distant, and quite unlike what he expected. He felt chilled by such a reception, and hardly knew how to address her. An inquiry after Lady Louisa, and a question, whether she was present or not, were the most obvious things to say after the first greeting.

"Tolerably well," and "she is not here," were the brief, cold answers which he received; and then followed a long pause, equally embarrassing to the feelings of each. The coldness of Agnes was unaccountable to Herbert, and for a moment, he questioned with himself, whether he could have offered her any unintentional slight, by overlooking her in the crowd. "I first caught sight of you," said he, wishing to be satisfied on this point, "just before the end of the last quadrille; had you been in the room long?"

She said she had but just entered it.

"Then you will acquit me of blindness, I hope?"

"Certainly," was all she answered; and it was uttered with an air of absence, as if she scarcely knew what she said.

Nothing could be more discouraging, yet Herbert was going to address her again, when he felt his arm touched by some one behind, and Hartley's black, curly head, was projected across him, dispensing "how d'ye do's" to Agnes and the Miss Tyrwhitts. "Herbert," said he, immediately afterwards, half aloud, "I knew it was you,

though I had not the honour of seeing your face; I saw Miss Morton's, and that was enough, for I knew where you ought to be. Miss Morton, Lacy does not look happy, I hope he has not been in the water again."

Agnes and Herbert both attempted, with ill success, to cover their vexation under a forced laugh, and Hartley, who saw that his observation was not well received, turned away, and applied himself to the easier task of entertaining the Miss Tyrwhitts. Herbert, at the same time walked away, dejected and mortified, by a reception for which he could assign no possible reason. He had, however, some satisfaction in thinking, that it did not seem the result of anger. Perhaps it arose simply from dejection; perhaps from illness, or fatigue; and this thought sensibly appeased him.

He was standing at a little distance from Agnes, consoling himself with this idea, with his eyes unconsciously fixed upon her, when he found himself addressed by Sackville. "I know whom you are looking at," said the latter, in a whisper, "is not she charming?" Lacy started and coloured, and almost mechanically assented. "I am glad you say so," pursued Sackville, in the same quiet tone, "for I have a high opinion of your judgment." Lacy thought the speech an odd one, and gave a quick inquiring look at his companion, but returned no answer.

There was a short pause, during which, Lacy had been turning in his mind this trivial remark, which every instant seemed to increase in significance, and to be the precursor of something still more startling, when Sackville, putting his arm within his, proceeded, in the same confidential whisper. "I believe," said he, speaking in his ear, "you have never heard of our engagement?"

"What engagement?" repeated Herbert, while an ominous chill ran through his frame.

"I mean," said Sackville, "our intended marriage."

The most terrible denunciation, hurled at Lacy, in a voice of thunder, could not have produced a more overpowering effect, than did these few simple words, so gently whispered in the tone of confidential friendship. He turned cold with agitation, and felt as if pulsation and breathing were for a while suspended. A dizziness seemed to seize him, and the lights and company swam confused before his eyes. He seemed to feel nothing but the hand of his rival upon his arm, and to hear only the low tones of his voice, though he knew not what he said, for all that followed those appalling words, "our intended marriage," had fallen unheeded on his ear.

With all this, he preserved a painful consciousness of his situation; of the many eyes that were prepared to notice any outward expression of his feelings; of the necessity of concealing them from the view of Sackville; and the consequent necessity of external calmness; and also that he was required to return immediately a suitable reply to Sackville's communication.

To the performance of this painful task, he roused himself with difficulty, and promptly uttered something expressive of his surprise at this intelligence, and thanks for the early information; but in what terms these sentiments were couched he scarcely knew. Still he almost doubted the truth of what he had heard, and it began to appear like a horrible dream, when the ill-omened voice of Sackville, again awakened him to the sad reality.

"It has not long been settled," said he, "and is not generally known; but you are quite at liberty to mention it. When things of this kind are positively determined, I see no use in making a mystery of them. It is better to be explicit. Do not you agree with me?"

Lacy assented.

"She concurs with me entirely on that point," pursued Sackville, looking at Agnes, and drawing Lacy gently towards the place where she was sitting; and also with respect to appearing in public. Seclusion, you know, is much in vogue, in these cases; but I think it idle, and she is so good as to conform to my notions; and so you see here she is to-night. She is not well; but as she had decided upon coming, she did not like to change her purpose. I believe she was influenced partly by the fear of keeping me away. And now I have a little request to make. Do ask her to dance: I know she likes dancing, and she won't stand up with me, because I am suffering from a sprain. Under these circumstances, it is not every one we should approve of as a partner; but you are a friend, so let me propose you."

Lacy had nothing to object; and Sackville instantly stepping up to Agnes, and leaning down towards her, said, "I hope you will dance. Pray do—dance with Lacy; he means to ask you. I have just told him every thing?"

She turned pale at this agitating proposal, but attempted no denial. Indeed at that moment, her tongue refused to give utterance to any words; and her silence was taken by Sackville for acquiescence. He looked round at Lacy, who was standing near, like a criminal awaiting sentence; and who, on catching Sackville's eye, mechanically approached. At the same time, Agnes rose from her seat: not a syllable was said by either; and a slight inclination of the head, concluded the compact. Lacy offered his arm; she accepted it in silence; and they walked away together, to take their places in the quadrille set which was then being formed.

How effectually do the obligations of society compel us to throw the mask of external calmness

over feelings of inward anguish! and how imperfectly can we judge by the unruffled exterior of those who tread with us the circle of the world, of the secret writhings of the spirit! Little was it suspected by any of those who mingled with Agnes and Herbert in the dance, how agonizing, at that festive moment, were their respective feelings. In addition to the painfulness of meeting under such altered circumstances, Agnes was severely wounded by Herbert's having wished to dance with her, after knowing her engagement; and she regretted that she had not refused him. What did his conduct seem to show? That he had never cared for her; that he had basely trifled with her affections; and that he was inclined to continue his insidious attentions at a time when they became actually criminal. It might be, hereafter, a subject of thankfulness, that she had been timely saved from a union with such a man; but this she could not feel at such a time, and the sense of his unworthiness, only planted another thorn in her bosom. To Herbert, still almost stupified with the shock of this sudden announcement, the situation was terrible beyond description. He had looked forward with natural delight to the happy time when he might press the hand of Agnes in the dance. That time had now arrived, and under what circumstances! He had felt her hand tremble as it rested on his arm. It might proceed from the embarrassing novelty of her situation; it might be an indication that he was not indifferent to her. Yet if so, why was she another's? And if it were so, what would it avail him? His rival was a kind, confiding friend, who had saved his life at the hazard of his own; and honour and gratitude forbad Lacy to endeavour to supplant him. He knew not whether Agnes was aware of his acquaintance with the altered circumstances under which they now met. He longed to

apprize her of it, and to say that it was at the request of Sackville that he had ventured to claim her hand.

Once or twice, he was on the point of speaking to that effect, and the words were on his lips, when fears would flash across his mind, and the time, the place, publicity, chance of being overheard, her probable embarrassment, perhaps displeasure; these and similar considerations, rose to his imagination, and diverted him from his half-formed purpose. In the delirium of the moment, he shunned the subject as something abhorrent to his nature, and strove to steep his senses in temporary forgetfulness. He would be, if possible, her gay, unthinking partner in the dance, and hide, even from her, the agony that dwelt within.

Little passed between them, and that little was rendered studiously light and irrelevant, and on his part even gay. Little did he know how the display of this miserable gaiety operated against him in her mind. She saw, indeed, that it did not sit easily upon him; but she attributed this his discomposure to the smittings of a conscience which reproached him for having trifled with her affections.

Had Lacy been less ardently attached, and had the blow fallen less heavily upon him, he would probably have been alive to the impressions which his conduct might produce in her. But in him, feeling was too powerfully predominant, to allow caution and reflection to operate; and his discerning faculties were blunted by the weight of this great calamity.

No allusion had yet been made to that circumstance which must annihilate the hopes of Lacy. He felt that it must soon be done, and yet he knew not when or how. Minute succeeded minute, and no present moment seemed appropriate to such a task. Hemmed round with smiling triflers, with

light laughter ringing in his ear, and scraps of lively common-place, at each instant audible around him, how could he frame his mind to speak of that which seemed as it were to extinguish the very light of his existence? As little would he in that scene of merriment have dwelt on the death of a dear relation.

The dance was ended; he had re-conducted Agnes to her seat; and the opportunity seemed to be lost. He stood awhile irresolute before her, mustering a courage which now promised to be rather dangerous than useful. His mind was in a better frame for speaking to her on this agitating topic, and he was prepared to have conveyed in a few simple words his knowledge of her intended marriage, and wishes for her happiness. He had no longer a chance of saying any thing that should be heard by her alone; but this he was now compelled to disregard, and he was about to bend forward to address her, when his arm was touched by a fan, and turning round he found himself accosted by his mother.

“Oh, Herbert,” said Lady Lacy, “I have been looking for you—come this way—I have something to say to you. How hot it is! Have you been dancing? Where is Emily?”

“I have not seen my sister lately.”

“Give me your arm; I want to find her. What an excellent ball! I have just been talking to the Dashwoods. Maria Dashwood looks so ill! I wonder how they could think of bringing her! Lady Dashwood says, she nodded to you just now, and you would not know her. I must take you to her to make your peace. By the bye, have you asked Charlotte Hartley to dance?”

“No, Ma’am; I have hardly seen her.”

“Oh, then, do! Indeed you ought,—and she has been sitting still, poor girl, all the last set. Are you engaged to any one now?”

“No.”

“Oh, then, pray ask her; there she is; I am pretty sure she is not engaged.”

No more she was; and as Lady Lacy continued to give him very broad hints in the hearing of the young lady, who evidently expected what was to follow, Herbert, however unwilling, could not without positive incivility, avoid leading her out. This, in the present state of his feelings, was to him a cruel penance. Miss Hartley was in lively spirits, and naturally expected a corresponding gaiety, from her partner, and this gaiety, amidst the torments of anguish almost insupportable, did Lacy endeavour to assume. The topics too, which Miss Hartley chose to introduce, were often of such a nature as to be peculiarly distressing.

“How Miss Morton is fallen off!” said she, after looking at the dejected countenance of Agnes.

“Don’t you think so, Mr Lacy?”

“She is rather young to fall off,” said Lacy; “she only happens not to be well.”

“Ah, perhaps it is that, or perhaps it is her dress. She is certainly not well dressed to-night—though perhaps she would not look well, if she *was* well dressed; and yet still, I don’t know, after all, whether it is not the dress that makes all the difference. What do you think, Mr. Lacy?”

“I am no judge in a question of dress.”

“Oh, yes, you are, if you would but think so. I cannot say Miss Morton strikes me as being so very, very handsome. She is not one of my beauties. Only look at Augusta Tyrwhitt; she is really perfectly lovely. There is no comparison between her and Miss Morton.”

“They are very different indeed,” said Lacy, and turned his head to avoid the pursuance of so unpleasant a theme.

Supper was soon announced; and Herbert, as in duty bound, conducted Miss Hartley thither, and sat by her at the table. Scarcely were they seated, and had begun to look about them, than Herbert discovered, to his sorrow, that Agnes and Sackville were situated directly opposite. To assume, under any circumstances, an unrestrained and cheerful manner, was now a painful task to Lacy; but to be exposed to their observation was a ten-fold aggravation of his misery.

Nor was the evil less to Agnes, who, though she thought at first that nothing could lessen the misfortune of being again subjected to the agitating presence of Lacy, would rather have seen him seated by any one than Charlotte Hartley. This young lady was in excellent spirits, and Agnes internally reproached herself for repining at her happiness. Lacy also wishing to divert his thoughts, and sensible of the necessity of concealing for the present what he felt, exerted himself to talk to Miss Hartley; and this appearance of marked attention, which was not unobserved by Agnes, tended only to confirm her in a belief of his utter want of regard for her, and of the truth of his reported engagement to that lady.

The necessity of a further interview with Agnes, continued to press with increasing force on Lacy's mind; and every minute brought fresh wonder, that hopes so vitally dear to him, should have been dismissed without a word. An opportunity was now eagerly sought; and the supper being ended, and he at length disencumbered of his partner, it was his first endeavour to find Agnes out. In a large house, with many rooms thrown open, and full of company, this was not an easy task; and, difficult, in truth, did Lacy find it. In his perambulations, he was first arrested by Lady Rodborough, who charged him with a little mission into the ball room;

and he was then fastened upon by Lady Appleby, from whose elegant superabundance of civil sayings, there was little chance of immediate escape.

"I do hope, Mr. Lacy," she said, with a plaintive look of expostulation, "that you have no immediate intention of running away from this delightful ball; for indeed, I must say that it has gone off remarkably well, and has been very fully and numerously attended: and must, I am sure, have been highly satisfactory to both Lord and Lady Rodborough, as indeed Lady Rodborough told me herself; for she said, that they had had several disappointments, and never expected to have had the pleasure of seeing so many of their friends about them; and now that they are here, I am sure I hope they will not think of breaking up so early, for that would be a thousand pities—and indeed, I must say that I think very few have actually ordered their carriages yet—at least, I know that only half of our party have any immediate intention of going. Mr. Morton, and myself, and Elizabeth, and Augusta, will probably stay some time; and indeed the others would not go if it were not that Miss Morton feels rather overcome with the heat, and is not equal——"

"Is Miss Morton going?" exclaimed Lacy.

"Yes, she is, and Lord Appleby, and ——"

Lacy would not stay to hear the enumeration of those who were to accompany her; and trusting that Lady Appleby's good nature would forgive the abruptness of his departure, hastily passed on, fearing that the opportunity might even now be lost, and vowing that if it were possible he would speak to Agnes again that night. He re-entered the anti-room—she was not there, nor in the saloon—she was probably gone to the entrance hall. He asked a servant, who met him in the corridor, if Mr. Morton's carriage was called. "No, Sir," was the answer, and the man passed on.

Lacy felt relieved from a great part of his anxiety, and was on the point of turning back, when the call of "Lord Appleby's carriage stops the way," caught his ear, which was immediately followed by the information that Lord Appleby was coming down. It instantly struck him that Agnes was going in that carriage, and that his exertions were indeed fruitless. There was no use in proceeding, yet he could not be satisfied without being assured by ocular proof of her actual departure. He entered the hall, saw a carriage at the door, with the step let down, and Sackville handing in a lady, whom, as her face was turned from him and her head enveloped in a hood, he could not distinguish; but who he doubted not was Agnes. In another minute the carriage was gone, and Lacy returned in useless regret to the ball-room.

Lady Lacy was in no haste to return; and for another hour did Herbert endure the misery of feeling himself obliged to wear the galling mask of cheerfulness, and to talk and smile, while his mind was afflicted with a more poignant sorrow than he had yet known.

At length, he was released from this state of torment; and never did prisoner quit his dungeon more willingly than he escaped from the splendid mansion of Westcourt. Little was said on the way home, for he pretended sleep, that he might muse in silence over the events of the past evening.

CHAPTER XXIII.

True generosity rises above the ordinary rules of social conduct, and flows with much too full a stream to be comprehended within the precise marks of formal precepts. It sanctifies every passion, and adds grace to every acquisition of the soul: and if it does not necessarily include, at least, it reflects a lustre upon the whole circle of moral and intellectual qualities.

MELMOTH—*Fitzosborne's Letters.*

AFTER a night of feverish sleep, Lacy awoke to a melancholy recollection of the past, and an anxious consideration of the steps which it now remained for him to take. His final determination was to see Agnes, if possible, that morning, and to defer all communication to his father, till he could also relate to him the result of the interview.

At breakfast Herbert met Sir William, who doubting not that his son had passed an evening of the most unmixed gratification, assailed him with many sportive remarks and questions, which it was distressing to receive, and difficult to answer. Agitated by these unconscious attacks, Herbert withdrew himself as soon as possible; and being eager to arrive at a clearer understanding of the terms on which he and Agnes were henceforth to meet, rode over to Dodswell. On arriving there, he was told that Mr. Morton and Sackville were not at home; neither were the ladies, "who," added the servant, "are out walking."

As the man said this, Herbert cast his eyes towards the shrubbery; and, at the same time, caught

a glimpse of a female figure at a distance, which he immediately conceived to be Agnes. It disappeared almost as soon as it was visible; but it was sufficient to determine his course; and, giving his horse to the servant, he set out in quest of her.

Agnes, who had suffered much, and who felt constrained to assume tranquillity in the presence of Sackville and her father, was ineffectually endeavouring to allay the fever of her mind in a solitary walk; and Sackville, who understood her feelings, had considerably abstained from intruding his society when he knew she wished to be alone. Walking slowly to and fro in a sequestered alley of the shrubbery, earnestly did she endeavour to collect her scattered thoughts. In many various lights did she consider the conduct of Lacy, in which there was much that she did not understand. That he should have received, so coolly, tidings which, if his former manner were any thing but the most hollow and frivolous gallantry, ought to have cost him such a pang?—That it should instantly have been followed by a request of her hand, as if their situations were still unchanged! That he should have uttered not one syllable in allusion to this startling event!—these were all subjects of sorrow and surprise. His silence, it is true, might be interpreted favourably. An indifferent person would, perhaps, have whispered some formula of congratulation; one who felt deeply could not. His manner, too, was far from being cheerful and composed; and though there were gleams of gaiety in it, it was a forced unnatural gaiety, as if assumed to conceal his real feelings.

These considerations again induced her to believe that Lacy really cared for her. Then again would she reproach herself for questioning on such a subject: she was the affianced bride of another, and must learn to forget that Lacy had ever held a

place in her heart. Then arose a consideration still more serious, whether she were justified, with her affections thus disposed, in accepting the hand of another; whether she could fulfil her marriage vow, and could offer other than an imperfect pledge and a divided love.

“I know not,” said she; “these are points which I cannot argue with the coolness of an uninterested reasoner; but I sincerely trust that this sacrifice of my best affections will not be blameable in the sight of Heaven. If I cannot love as I could wish, him whose lot I shall engage to follow, still I trust I shall so fulfil the duties of a wife, that he shall never have cause to reproach me for any want of due affection. If my sentiments are erroneous, on my head will the misery fall; and I can never lose the satisfaction of feeling, that by the sacrifice of my own happiness, I have saved my parents from misfortune. As for Lacy, be his sentiments what they may, there remains no course but to forget him.”

She was mournfully repeating to herself this last resolution, when approaching footsteps caught her ear. She turned, and Lacy stood before her. The ardour of impatient search had flushed his cheek, while that of Agnes was pale as death. It was for both an agitating moment, and to Lacy scarcely less than to Agnes, though he it was that sought the interview. He was the first to speak.

“I was told,” said he, in a voice that trembled with emotion, “that you were here, and I came in search of you.”

“My father is not here,” replied Agnes, scarcely knowing what she said, yet feeling with instinctive delicacy, that she ought not to be the object of Lacy’s visit. “I am afraid I cannot tell you where he is. Was your visit to him—or——” she could not utter the name of Sackville.

“It was you, I wished to see,” said Lacy. “I

what I will ask now. Is it true?" said he, lowering his voice to a deep earnest whisper; "is that true which I heard last night!"

She understood his meaning, though it was imperfectly expressed. She trembled with agitation; and the words "Quite true," alone escaped her lips.

A distressing silence followed her reply. Each was conscious that, in the hurry of the moment, they had allowed their tone and manner to express too plainly their real feelings; and Lacy became aware that the abruptness of his address could be excused on no other ground.

"Pray forgive me," he said, "if I offend you—I hardly know what I am saying—I know that I owe you an apology. Last night—what must you have thought of me! that under such circumstances, I should have shown so little delicacy as to claim your hand! to lead you out to observation! *I* too! but *he* wished it, or I should not have presumed. It was kindly meant—it was a mark of his confidence; for he did not know—But! I am wandering; I am going to tell what you should not know any more than he—but no matter—disguise is impossible—I will tell you all."

"No, Mr. Lacy—no," exclaimed Agnes, turning from him. "Tell me nothing, I entreat you; I have no wish—no right to know. Remember my situation, and respect it. The time is past—I cannot—must not hear what you would say."

"Then you can guess what I would say?" replied Lacy, eagerly. "Yes, I see you understand me. You can believe that mine was no unmeaning preference, no heartless, frivolous attention. You can believe that, whatever I had been required to sacrifice to ensure your happiness, I would"——

"Enough, enough," cried Agnes. "Yes, I can believe it all; but this is no fit subject for us

now. Pray leave me, Mr. Lacy. No good can come from such a conversation. Go, I entreat you; and take with you every wish for your future happiness that I am permitted to form."

Lacy walked away a few paces, as if about to obey her bidding; then stood irresolute awhile; then in another moment had returned, and was once more at her side.

"It is not a week," said he, "since I met you in that house, and was permitted to intimate, if not by words, at least by manner, the presumptuous expectations which I had formed. I will not blame you, Miss Morton, for not having then assumed a severity of air which is foreign to the charitableness of your disposition. But had I been then repulsed, however harshly, I feel that I should have been spared much of the pain of this great and unexpected blow—nay, Miss Morton—pray hear me—grant me this little recompense, though it may be somewhat irksome. I should have been spared not only this terrible surprise, but the consciousness that I had incurred the risk of giving pain to the very admirable person to whom you will be united. You probably know how much I owe him—indeed I remember to have told you—and I can now call to mind that you endeavoured to abate what you considered the excess of my gratitude. Perhaps you thought that I said more than I truly felt—but indeed it was not so—and my actions shall now prove it; and you shall see that I can look forward with calmness and satisfaction to my friend's happiness, even when it is attended with the sacrifice of my own."

His voice faltered slightly, as he pronounced these last words, and he stopped for a while to regain firmness and composure. Agnes uttered not a word; she was very pale; her respiration almost ceased; she thought herself on the point of fainting, and leaned against a tree for support.

"I have a question," resumed Lacy, "one serious question to ask you, and, if you are at liberty, I solemnly entreat you to answer it, for you will thereby enable me to discharge an act of justice. I would ask you," continued he, lowering his voice, which was almost choked with emotion, "does Sackville, according to your belief, know or even think that I have, however involuntarily, been at any time his rival? It is a bold question, but I trust you will forgive it; pray answer it, if you may."

"I do not believe," said Agnes, in a voice that was scarcely articulate, "that he has ever thought you such."

"I am glad of it," exclaimed Lacy, after a short pause; "and may he never think so. He must wish to be my friend, and I would spare him the pain of believing that he has unintentionally been my enemy. I thought that he perhaps suspected what my views had been, and that he had therefore granted me last night the privilege of your hand as the highest mark of his confidence. If it were so, I thank him for trusting that I should never attempt to resist his claims. He shall see that his confidence has not been misplaced. I have not known him very long; but I can feel and admire his superior qualities. But it is useless for me to praise him to you. You can appreciate him much better than I can. I have been too bold; but when the heart is very full—forgive my abruptness—I cannot say all I would—may God bless you both—farewell?"

He turned away as, with a faltering voice, he uttered these last words; but felt as if he would fain say more, and seemed rooted to the spot, unable to quit her dangerous presence.

At this moment, approaching footsteps were heard, and before either was conscious of it, Sack-

ville had joined them. A short glance at their countenances sufficed to tell him, that an agitating interview had taken place, and it was a circumstance calculated to impart no slight agitation to the breast of Sackville. But he had great powers of self-command; and, smothering all external trace of the jealous suspicions which then flashed across his mind, he advanced with all the alacrity of cheerful friendship to welcome Lacy, who, on being greeted, awoke as from a trance. Sackville's calmness seemed to be momentarily imparted to him. He regained his self-possession, repressed his emotion, and could reply to the questions and remarks of his companion with collectedness, and apparent ease; while Sackville, offering one arm to Agnes, and putting the other within that of Lacy, walked between them to the house.

The conversation, in which Sackville purposely relieved them by taking himself the greater share, was light and unimportant, and related chiefly to the last night's ball, and the persons present at it. At the same time, it was guarded with admirable tact from containing any allusion harassing to the feelings of Agnes and Lacy. Yet the restraint under which these feelings were now suppressed was in itself acutely painful; and when at length they reached the house, Agnes eagerly quitted them, to give vent to her sorrows in the solitude of her own apartment.

Agitated, harassed, oppressed as she had been, she had not yet shed one tear. But when she found herself alone, and free from the restraint of others' presence, she ceased to maintain the dreadful struggle, and wept long and bitterly. At first she scarcely knew for what she wept. There was one dark mingled tissue of misery, one vague oppressive gloom which gathered around her, and seemed to weigh her to the earth; and left her

only an undefined sensation of being inconsolably wretched—she was hardly conscious how or why. But as her mind grew more composed it awoke to the perception of distinct sources of grief. She found that the fancied barrier by which she had purposed to exclude Lacy from her thoughts had vanished since their last meeting, and that, instead of being an unmeaning trifler, who cared nor for her, and whom it was an act of justice to forget, he was one who nourished a sincere attachment, who was keenly wounded by her seeming fickleness, whom she had cruelly wronged, and whose generous conduct had produced for him a still greater portion of her admiration. All the considerations through which she had steeled herself to the sacrifice, had proved ungrounded, and nothing remained to uphold her courage but a stern sense of duty.

We must return to Lacy, whom Agnes left alone with Sackville. His situation was rendered less trying by her absence; and he had time to call to aid his natural strength of mind, and to speak with firmness and composure on that which was to him the most afflicting of all subjects. Sackville was even surprised at the steadiness of his tone; and wishing to avoid any thing like an explanation, was very willing to lead the conversation to other things. But Lacy had no wish to shun the one great topic which was uppermost in his mind, and voluntarily offered his congratulations.

“Sackville,” said he, “I have reason to be very grateful to you, and I should have a bad opinion of myself if I did not wish you every earthly happiness. I think you have made such a choice as can hardly fail to ensure it. It may perhaps be presumptuous for me to praise Miss Morton, short as my acquaintance with her has been; but so much as this I will say: May you both ever contribute to

each other's happiness!" and he wrung his companion's hand, and left him.

Sackville, during this last interview, had been touched with a momentary compunction. There is no magnet, which attracts our sympathy more powerfully than generosity; and the brightness of this trait in Lacy, had penetrated even to the cold obdurate heart of Sackville. And yet he well knew beforehand this property of his friend's disposition, and had deliberately planned to turn his very virtues into arms that should operate against him. He had calculated with detestable subtilty, the hold which a former act of preservation would give him over his grateful heart; and he hoped to bind the tie still stronger, by studied friendliness of manner, and early confidence on the subject of his engagement. Sackville had not, like many bad men, a disbelief in the virtue of others. He could accurately foresee the virtuous line of conduct which they would take; but he viewed it coolly and speculatively, as the result of a certain temperament, or disposition of character, not much more admirable, or intrinsically moral, than their devotion to any one pursuit, and almost equally resolvable into whim. Yet in spite of this callousness of feeling, he could not but be somewhat moved by the generosity of his much injured rival; and he felt for a while, that inward pang, which comes ever and anon to shake the triumph even of successful guilt.

L. J. M. Galy
HERBERT LACY.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF GRANBY.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

Thos. ¹³⁴ Henry Lister

La morale est la science des sciences à ne la considérer que sous le rapport du calcul; et il y a toujours des limites à l'esprit de ceux qui n'ont pas senti l'harmonie de la nature des choses avec les devoirs de l'homme.

MADAME DE STAEL.

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1858.

HERBERT LACY.

CHAPTER I.

Suspicious among thoughts, are like bats among birds; they ever fly by twilight.

BACON.

LACY repaired from these trying scenes, to the still remaining painful task of acquainting his father with the sudden downfall of his hopes. The expression of his countenance, as he entered the room, sufficiently prepared Sir William for the evil tidings that were to follow.

“Where have you been?” said the latter, looking anxiously at his son.

“To Dodswell,” replied Herbert; and then, without further preface, in a few simple words, he described the discovery of the preceding night, and the interview which he had undergone that morning.

“It is a strange affair,” said the Baronet, when his son had finished his painful recital, “and I cannot understand it. It is but a week, Herbert, since I saw you both together: I could then have sworn that she felt a preference for you; and if this was not the case, and my old judgment is de-

ceived by modern manners, still I must think her more deficient in discernment, than the very weakest of her sex, not to perceive that you betrayed a more than common admiration for her; yet never could I see, that she repelled or received your attentions coldly—no, not even in the presence of Sackville; nor did he seem jealous, or uneasy.—And yet, under the circumstances, what else could have been expected? I cannot understand it, Herbert: but answer me one thing—do you believe that she is really attached to Sackville?”

“I have seen no symptoms of attachment,” replied Herbert; “indeed, all that I have seen and heard, except this startling fact of their actual engagement, leads me to conclude the contrary. I can remember, that once at Huntley, she spoke of him rather coldly—could that be artifice? No! no, she is superior to artifice. Yet that was scarce two months since, and surely betokened nothing like increasing attachment. In fact, both at the ball, and this morning, she seemed unhappy—deeply so, as if there were something on her mind. It is a mystery, quite a mystery; I cannot understand it.”

Both were silent for a while, and seemed to be pondering on the peculiarities of the case. Sir William was the first to speak. “I do not pretend,” said he to solve the mystery completely, but I cannot stifle my suspicions. There has been some trick, some juggle. She has been sacrificed to Sackville.”

“Good heavens, Sir!—but how? and why?”

“Nay, I know no more than you. I judge only from your description, and from what I observed of her manner last week. I cannot help thinking that the poor girl has been driven into this match, against her will. She is a wealthy prize, and Sackville is one of her trustees, and he must know, that

she is well worth winning, be she attached to him or not."

"It is just possible," said Herbert; "but I should be unwilling to think, that Sackville would lend himself to such a transaction."

"So should I, Herbert, and though your opinion may be false, I like to hear you express it. A proneness to suspicion is least commendable in a young man; and I am glad to see that you have no disposition, to think worse of others than you can help. Sackville has been, on one occasion, a valuable friend to you; and I shall ever hope for an opportunity of showing him the gratitude that a father ought to feel. Perhaps I have betrayed a want of this, in allowing myself to entertain injurious suspicions of him; but remember that I have received no pledge of his virtues except your praise, and *that*, when your affections are prepossessed is apt to be somewhat lavishly bestowed. But we will not pursue this subject. It only gives you needless pain; and our speculations upon it are utterly unavailing. Miss Morton, whether willingly or not, has engaged to give her hand to another, and it is not for us to interfere. I wish I could give you any comfort or assistance. I believe silence is the best balm; and let me assure you, my dear Herbert, that I will never henceforward wound you, by wantonly dragging forth your disappointment as a subject for my discussion: but, at the same time believe me when I say that my ears, will always be open to the slightest syllable, you may choose to utter."

Here the subject was dropped, and, as it seemed to both parties, was never again to be resumed. Sir Willian Lacy, though he felt compassion for the afflictions of his son, was not eventually sorry to see him precluded from forming a connection which he had so many reasons for disliking; and

notwithstanding the opposite tendency of his just suspicions, he chose to take it for granted that Miss Morton was irrevocably lost to Herbert. Nor did Herbert himself think otherwise; for even when he admitted the tempting supposition that Agnes might, by possibility, secretly prefer him to Sackville, and that a trifling exertion on his part would enable him to supplant his rival, still he recoiled with generous firmness from such a plan when he reflected that this rival was the man to whose prompt exertions he had owed his life.

About a fortnight now elapsed without any further communication between the families at Lacy and Dodswell: nor did any tidings reach the former respecting the Mortons, or any of their connections, except an announcement which the baronet made one morning to his son, that Lord Rodborough, as he was informed, in a note from Allen, had concluded the purchase of the Bloxwich estate. "Here is the note," said the Baronet; and Herbert took it and read it through.

"There is one part," said he, "which I don't understand; 'I am glad that my hint was not thrown away.' What does he refer to?"

"Heaven knows," said the baronet, carelessly; "I hope it was that I should burn his letter, for I certainly did it—half read. Come, Herbert, don't put on that long expostulating face—I know what you mean—and if I was not exempted, *jure paterno*, you would read me a lecture on carelessness in matters of business; but it would be of no use—it would not convert me—I hate your precisions in petty affairs."

Not long after the time when this conversation took place, a meeting was convened at the County Hall, at ———, for the purpose of petitioning parliament for the speedy abolition of slavery. Sir William, who had been reading a good deal on

that subject, had warmed himself, by a course of pamphlets, into a strong feeling of interest; and Herbert, who let slip no opportunity of drawing his father from his retirement, and inducing him to associate more freely with his neighbours, gladly took advantage of the present bias of his mind to engage him to attend the meeting. They accordingly went; and Herbert, who was solicitous to wean himself from his own distresses, by fixing his attention upon other objects, would have received much gratification from its proceedings, had not the consciousness of one circumstance, of a different nature, soon become painfully obtrusive. Once before, at a general muster of the gentlemen of the county, Herbert had been pained by observing the very little consideration in which his father seemed to be held. Remembering, this, he was, in the present instance, rather curious to see whether any improvement manifested itself in the cordiality with which he was received by his neighbours: but he saw, to his sorrow, that their general demeanor was, by no means, more favourable, and that there were now instances of actual avoidance which amounted almost to rudeness, and even in the very persons who had formerly shown some degree of courtesy.

Mr. Morton, in particular, guardedly abstained, throughout the meeting, from exchanging a word or even look, with Sir William Lacy or his son. Herbert was a good deal hurt at this, though he could easily conceive that the susceptible temper of Mr. Morton might have discovered some ground of offence which would awaken his former grudge: the cause however, of a similar coldness in others, was utterly beyond his comprehension. It was a subject in which delicacy forbade him to make any observations to his father, who was evidently chagrined at the reception he had experienced; and

though he endeavoured to laugh it off in a vein of caustic pleasantry, was, in reality deeply mortified.

The treatment which he had received rendered him still more averse to society; the neighbourhood became hateful to him; every man, in Sir William's imagination, seemed to be his enemy; and with a morose stubbornness of determination, which in him was unusual, he refused to appear, or admit any visitors to his house, during the great annual assemblage of the principal families of the county, at the Henbury races, which were to take place in a few days. His refusal was the more extraordinary, and was the more strenuously combatted by Lady Lacy, because their son-in-law, Charles Hartley, was to be one of the stewards—the other steward was Lord Malvern.

CHAPTER II.

Strange though it seem—yet, with extremest grief
Is link'd a mirth—it doth not bring relief—
That playfulness, of sorrow ne'er beguiles,
And smiles in bitterness—but still it smiles.

BYRON.

AT length the first day of the races arrived. Hartley, whose office obliged him to be on the spot, was staying in Henbury with his wife and sister; and on the morning of the first day, Lady Lacy and Herbert went with them, and some other friends, to the course.

England presents few more animating or characteristic spectacles than that truly national one, a race-course. What a medley of objects does it comprise! The neat light stand; the tent-like booths; the grotesque shapes of caravans, with their broad display of painted canvass, well peopled with glaring monsters; the high and ever moving swings; the carriages of every form, hue, and denomination, from the coroneted coach and six to the humble donkey-cart, or the uncouth wagon, with its twenty insides—while the formal barricades which line the course, crown with an air of order the seeming irregularity of the whole.

But how great is the addition to this *coup d'œil*, if we take some note of the animated objects that fill the picture! The bright array of figures, gleaming from the balcony of the stand—the humbler throng that move below—the horsemen and their

steeds—the miscellaneous concourse of pedestrians—motley coloured tumblers—honest blue-stockinged countrymen, in grey or russet—the liveried figures dispersed among the mass, and contrasting their gay dresses with the coarser habiliments of the mob. Nor must we forget the recruiting party, which seldom fails to swell the crowd—the drum and fife, and stately sergeant at the head—and a long train of ill-starred youths, with colours in their hats, trying to assume a martial strut, though looking half repentant of their bargain.

But what is the pictorial pleasure arising from such a scene, compared with the interest of that event, which seems at once to fill every head and strain every eye, whether of the youthful beauty in the stand, or the grave, cool *black-leg* above stairs.

The countless throng are about to be repaid for a long period of expectation: a bell has been heard—they are saddling the horses—in a few minutes, two appear, and gallop towards the stand. The race must be begun—no—they are soon pulled in, and walked back—and then two more appear in sight—and then another—and still another, and are similarly paraded before the spectators; while cards are studied with increased attention, and blue, and red, and buff, and orange, assigned to their respective owners. Then, one by one, they all walk back—and, at some distance from the stand, a crowd appears to be forming itself; and horsemen flock in eager haste from various points to this one quarter. Then expectation begins to be more strongly painted in every face, and there is an increased stillness in the crowd. Then again, a bell is sounded, and is followed by a stillness deeper than before. Then, all at once is heard on every side a low murmur; one single sentence bursts simultaneously from the assembled multitude; and “They

are off!" is exclaimed at the same instant by a thousand tongues. The crowd divides, and six horses sweep in line from the distance-post towards the stand.

The equality is not long preserved—before two hundred yards are traversed, one is far ahead—the two next run almost abreast; then follow the others successively: and the favourite is last but one. Soon the leading horse begins to slacken his speed, and the three first are close together—the struggle is now between these; and the vaunted favourite succeeds only in passing the fourth. But every instant, the aspect of the race is altered. The horse which led, is now third; and the contest for pre-eminence is confined to two. More than half the course is traversed—the two first are far ahead—and the favourite only abreast of the third horse. He cannot win. 'Tis "the two first against the field" for any odds. And now you may offer to name the winner, for one of the two is a length ahead, while the favourite is third, and several yards behind the second. They approach the distance post, and the race is still between those two—no—one has failed completely, and has dropped at once, not only far behind the first but even behind the favourite also.

And now the latter is perceived to gain gradually on the first horse—he is three lengths behind—two—one—and now, you say he has a chance—but, no—he does not seem to gain any longer upon the other, whose rider, dressed in yellow, whips hard and keeps his station. The rider of the favourite does not whip—he seems to be pulling in—perhaps he knows that he must lose—it is but thirty yards to the winning chair. A shout is heard of "yellow wins!" and "blue for a thousand!" and the roar is tremendous, and "blue, blue!" is the prevailing cry.

In another second, all is decided—blue all at once lets out his horse—the effect is instantaneous—he passes the other like a shot, within a few yards of the winning chair—“blue,” is shouted louder than ever, and all is lively exclamation; and your excited feelings (if a novice) are not cooled till, on turning, with loud commendations on the excellent race, to the experienced man of the turf at your elbow, you are told, with a quiet smile, that it was a hollow thing from the first; that the yellow never had a chance; and that blue held in all the time, and might have won by half a distance.

Such was the scene which was presented on the Henbury race-course on the first day, when Herbert Lacy attended the stand. Our description of it is not such as would have come from him; but is rather that of a novice, much amused, and strictly attentive to the peculiarities of the scene before him. But, in Herbert's case, feelings of another kind now filled his thoughts, and prevented him from experiencing that lively interest which he generally took in all that was passing around him. He knew it was probable that he might here again meet Agnes; and though he had no doubts with respect to the line of conduct which he ought to take, he felt that it would be difficult to assume the unembarrassed cheerfulness of mere acquaintanceship.

Agnes was almost the first person he saw, as he entered the stand with Charlotte Hartley hanging on his arm. The reports of their supposed engagement had never reached him, or this circumstance would have given him some uneasiness. Agnes was at that time sitting rather remote from him, surrounded by persons, most of whom he knew only by name; and as Herbert, however anxious to accost her, was careful to avoid all approach

to familiarity of manner, he first addressed himself to such acquaintance as lay more immediately in his way.

Having gone through the necessary course of greetings, with persons whom he was neither glad nor sorry to see, he gradually moved towards that quarter of the room where Agnes was sitting. When he first entered, she had been grave; but now he found her in lively spirits, talking, as it appeared, gaily and amusingly to those around her.

This was not quite what he expected, and he was rather disturbed at its want of harmony with the state of his own feelings. He did not wish her to betray to the world her sense of the peculiarity of their situation: but as she knew what he had suffered on her account, he thought that in his presence she need not have been quite so cheerful. In this reproachful mood did he advance to speak to her, striving, in bitterness of heart, to mould his features into the same air of cheerfulness, and hoping that he should at least be rewarded by a cordial address.

But Agnes was in no haste to notice him. Her whole mind at that moment seemed to be engaged in the formation of a lottery, and she was trying to obtain a pair of scissars to cut up a card.

“Who will befriend me?” said she, looking round as Lacy drew near; “I know I must apply to a gentleman—no lady carries any thing half so useful. Mr. Luscombe—oh, thank you—what an excellent friend you are! You are like the man in Peter Schlemihl, with the inexhaustible pockets—don’t bow, for it is not a compliment. Thank you, Mr. Lacy, they are quite well. Who is our treasurer?—My father is not here this morning.—Are Sir William and Lady Lacy here?—Now, Mr. Sedley, you may draw.”

And then, without bestowing another look on Lacy, she went on with lively conversation, to her other acquaintance, about the arrangements of their lottery.

Lacy was surprised and mortified. A sense of the awkwardness of his situation, added, perhaps, not a little to his distress. He had introduced himself, for the sake of accosting her into the centre of a large group of persons, whom, with the exception of Luscombe, he did not know; and when she refused to attend to him, he had no longer any one to address. He stood for a short time, a silent spectator of their proceedings, and then, feeling himself an intruder in the circle, he turned round and walked away. He retired with no enviable feelings. He entertained for the moment, strong displeasure against Agnes, the stronger, perhaps, from the ardency of his attachment; for a slight wounds more severely, in proportion to our regard for the person that offers it.

But this sentiment was soon changed into vexation at his own behaviour. Why so imprudently eager to address her? Why introduce himself into a group of persons, amongst whom she alone could be the object of his attention? Was this his delicacy? This his caution? Would his avoidance have offended her, or argued indifference? No, she would acknowledge the propriety of his course; and there had passed *that* at there last meeting, which no trifling omission of commonplace ceremony, could cause her to forget. All this he could admit; but still he was offended at her liveliness of manner. It might, it was true, be assumed; but still, why to such excess? Alas! he did not reflect, that it was no easy task for Agnes to regulate the display of her fictitious gaiety.

Plunged in these harassing ruminations, he stood apparently listless and unobservant in the midst of the cheerful scene around him. He tried at length to arouse himself to the enjoyment of the present moment. He succeeded in personating the calm observer; heard the buz of conversation, and could catch such imperfect scraps as the following.

“Mr. Sackville—Miss Morton—engaged long before she came out.”—“Hartley, what did you do at Doncaster?”—“I did not *do*, I was *done*.”—“How d’ye do, Lady Appleby?”—“Quite well, thank you—particularly sorry—quite delighted—so much obliged.”—“Good races, Lord Appleby.”—“Why—a—yes—but, between ourselves, I—”—“Who is that?”—“I must ask Mrs. Poole.”—“That? oh, his name is”—(inaudible)—“Rich?”—“Very, his father kept a lottery-office—one must not inquire how money comes or goes either, in these sort of places.”—“Mr. Luscombe, might I beg.”—“Too happy—pray allow me.”—“Midhurst, what did you kill on the moors?”—“Forty brace of grouse, and a setter.”—“Pretty.”—“Paints.”—“Must be natural.”—“No, I assure you—rouges slily—‘blooms unseen,’ as the poet says.”—“What have you drawn?”—“Lord Rodborough’s Artaxomines.”—“Been drawn already—does not run.”—“Tell me—do—what is a handicap?”—“A handicap, Miss Tyrwhitt? oh, a handicap is——”—“I am sorry to hear it—should be careful—might have been distanced.”—“Party from Westcourt.”—“Seven to four.”—“Marriage talked of.”—“Birds wild.”—“Candlelight beauty”—“Ordinary before dusk.”

Dissatisfied with all about him, Lacy strove to beguile the irksomeness of the time by change of scene; and soon quitted the stand for the winning

chair, where, amongst others, he found the stewards, his brother-in-law, and Lord Malvern,—“L’Allegro,” and “Il Penseroso,” as they had been not unaptly named. Hartley was, as usual, all life and good humour, and would soon have raised the spirits of Lacy, almost to their customary level, had not the cold and distant manner of Lord Malvern rather pained and surprised him. Lord Malvern had much natural reserve; but with Lacy, whom he seemed to like, he had been accustomed to throw it off; and his altered behaviour in the present instance, was consequently calculated to cause the latter some uneasiness.

Another circumstance occurred, at the same time, which, though slight, made rather a strong impression on Lacy. While in the steward’s stand, he saw Mr. Morton crossing the course, as if with the intention of coming there also. When he was close to it, Lord Malvern who was leaning over, spoke to him, and Lacy understood him to answer, that he was coming to join their party. Mr. Morton was at the foot of the steps, when Lacy suddenly changed his position, and as the former looked up, their eyes met. At that instant, Mr. Morton seemed to Lacy to check himself; turned his head quickly in another direction; looked up and down the line of carriages, as if searching for somebody; and then, all at once, as if having found the object of his search, walked hastily away.

Lacy followed him with his eyes, and perceived, that instead of going in the direction in which he seemed to look, he returned again, after taking a circuitous route, to the stand. There was little in his conduct, that would have excited observation, had not Lacy been predisposed to attach an interest and importance to all his movements. Lord Malvern and Hartley, neither of them made any re-

mark; no more did Lacy: but he thought much, and inferred that Mr. Morton had been studying to avoid him, which opinion contributed not a little to swell the aggregate of painful feelings which that morning had produced.

CHAPTER III.

Beware
Of entrance to a quarrel; but being in,
Bear it, that the opposer may beware of thee.
Hamlet.

AFTER quitting the course, Lacy repaired to the ordinary, and from thence, after two or three hours of forced joviality, he gladly proceeded to the ball. This ball was a great event in the county, and usually produced a numerous assemblage of the country families, for many miles round. It was generally pronounced to be well attended, and it was so on the present occasion. The Rodboroughs had lent all their consequence to dignify Lord Malvern's stewardship; and Hartley, though little supported, either by his own or his wife's relations, had, by dint of activity, and his own popularity, secured a considerable attendance of his particular acquaintance; and had especially deserved the thanks of the chaperons for bringing so large a number of young men. Herbert went to the ball as one of Hartley's party; and, as might have been expected, the two stewards, with their immediate friends, were among the first arrivals.

A large room, ill filled, is always a melancholy sight; and such was this when Lacy entered it.—It contained scarcely any but Lord Malvern's party, who were in a group together at the further end, and comprised, in addition to many others,

Lord and Lady Rodborough, the Ladies Sedley, Lady Malvern, Sackville, Agnes Morton, and her father. Hartley, who preceded the others, had already, when Lacy came in, paid his respects to this assemblage, and had now returned to his own set, which formed a corresponding group at the other end of the room.

The Rodborough family were not eminently popular. They had the reputation, among their country neighbours, of being fine and fastidious, which was true of all except Lord Malvern, whose cold, reserved habits, nevertheless, caused him to be unjustly charged with the greatest proportion of this failing. The Hartleys' party, therefore, though bearing no ill-will towards the Rodboroughs, did not feel inclined to traverse the whole extent of a long room for the purpose of accosting persons from whom they were by no means secure of a cordial reception. The same feeling, in some degree, withheld Lacy, who, though he might no longer seek the society of Agnes, and could take no pleasure in that of Sackville, would not so long have held back had it not been for the unpleasant doubts conveyed to his mind by the manner of Lord Malvern and Mr. Morton towards him that morning. It was, therefore, natural that he should shrink from approaching a circle in which his reception was so doubtful, and in which at any rate, the presence of Agnes must awaken agitating thoughts.

By degrees, however, the room began to fill—the formidable blanks were lessened, and on Hartley moving upwards to concert measures for a commencement with his fellow-steward, and to claim, in his official capacity, the hand of Lady Mary Sedley, Herbert availed himself of this arrangement to enter the circle, and go through his course of recognitions.

The result was not encouraging. Lord Rodborough was cold and distant; Lady Rodborough, though not uncivil, seemed less disposed to talk to him than she had been at her own ball; Lady Malvern, with whom he had become well acquainted at Huntley, now treated him as a comparative stranger. Sackville, though perfectly friendly in his manner, was too much engaged in talking to others to give him much of his attention. Mr. Morton appeared to be manœuvring to avoid him, and acknowledged him only with a grave bow; and Lacy had the additional pain of observing that the countenance of Agnes, which had been in some degree animated till his approach, was then suddenly chilled into reserve.

Thus met, he soon withdrew in mortification and disgust. For the coldness of the Rodboroughs he cared little; but the astrangement of the Mortons gave him much concern, and he would gladly have pressed for an explanation of its cause, had not feelings, which can easily be imagined always prevented him whenever that wish arose. He tried to dismiss them from his thoughts, and resolved in a moment of pique, not only to devote himself exclusively to others, but to let them see that it was not in the power of their caprice to check the flow of his gaiety. The principle of reaction is very visible in the operation of the mind; and, after the depression which Lacy had endured, when he came to assume a contrary tone, his excited spirits vented themselves in an excess of mirthfulness; and his air and conversations which were usually animated, now became lively in an increased degree. He felt no real exhilaration: it was but a feverish excitement, which, on subsiding, would again leave him in depression. Nor was it easy gaiety: it had in it a degree of recklessness, which, in a private circle, would

have been soon observed; but, in a crowded ball-room, these nice shades were less distinguishable, and it easily passed for the genuine effervescence of lightened spirits. Never had he been so lavish of attentions to Miss Hartley; and instead of being indifferent and abstracted, as at the ball at West-court, he was now cheerful and attentive, and exerted himself for her entertainment.

Miss Hartley, who was really very pretty, and looked particularly well upon this occasion, seemed a very natural and deserving object of his homage; and many were induced to believe that Herbert was paying serious court to her, especially as Lady Lacy, who was highly delighted with her son's conduct, though she indeed refrained from saying any thing, contrived to look a great deal. The consequence was, that the report of Herbert's attachment to Miss Hartley, which before had been gently whispered, now received strong confirmation, and began to be very confidently mentioned by the various retailers of gossip.

On the following morning, the second and last day of the races, Lacy looked in vain for Agnes at the stand: neither did he meet with Mr. Morton, nor did any circumstance occur which tended to produce a change in his feelings. Lord Malvern still preserved the same unsocial coldness, and Lacy felt too proud and indignant to endeavour to remove it.

At length the sports of the course were terminated, and the gentlemen repaired to the noisy discomfort of a race ordinary, to partake of a bad dinner, and worse wine; and to endure afterwards a weary hour of tumultuous absurdity, the little conversational merriment which any of them could enjoy, being repeatedly checked by a vehement thumping on the table, the precursor of some hacknied toast, which had been handed down

from race to race, and doomed, by prescriptive right to be hailed with the idle clamour of three times three.

Mr. Morton was present at this dinner, and though he sat at no great distance from Lacy, on the other side of the table, abstained from all signs of recognition. Lacy, who was unwilling to think that he had given him any just cause of offence, and felt that perhaps his own manner might have conveyed a false impression of unfriendliness, determined not to omit any opportunity of arriving at a better understanding. The obvious attention of asking Mr. Morton to drink wine with him, he thought might possibly afford an opening for some resumption of civility. For some time he vainly endeavoured to catch his eye, or make him hear the invitation, and failing in this was obliged to have recourse to the surer method of sending round his message by a servant. To this message he received the singular answer that Mr. Morton had lately drank wine with another person, and begged to be excused; and Lacy was left in little doubt as to the existence of actual ill-will.

The dinner was ended; the wine had circulated; the muster-roll of toasts had at length been expended; the members for the county, and the members for the borough; the gentlemen who had sent their horses, and the owners of those that had won; the present stewards, and the stewards elect, had severally received their compliment, and returned their thanks; the steward had left the chair: the company had risen, and some were departing, and some were assembling in little knots in various parts of the room. By degrees the party grew thinner and thinner, till few were left except the immediate friends of the two stewards. Lacy and Hartley went out to give some orders, and in a few minutes returned,

As they entered, Mr. Morton was standing with his back towards them, at a little distance from the door, engaged in conversation with another gentleman, and Lacy could not avoid hearing distinctly a good deal of what they said. "Sneaking policy—dirty proceeding," were the first words which caught his ear. Then Mr. Morton's companion said something that was not audible, and Mr. Morton afterwards proceeded in rather a loud and angry tone—

"One cannot call such a man a gentleman. I never knew a more paltry method of currying favour—think of a person in his situation concealing his knowledge of a defective title!—making a merit of resigning the first refusal of an estate which he had been privately informed was not saleable! Pitiful, truly pitiful!"

Here he was checked by his companion, whose face was turned towards Lacy; and who, seeing him, said to Mr. Morton, in a low tone, "The son will hear you."

"I don't care if he does," replied Morton, whose natural irritability seemed to have been rather inflamed by wine, "I am not ashamed of what I am saying; and I will repeat, be he present or not, that Sir William Lacy was privately informed that the Bloxwich property was not saleable, before he made a merit of letting Lord Rodborough buy it."

Lacy heard every syllable of this charge, and so also did Hartley, who took him by the arm, and seemed desirous of leading him onward; but Lacy resisted, and evinced an intention of going towards Mr. Morton.

"Never mind him," whispered Hartley fearful of some explosion.

"I must," replied Lacy; "he has made an assertion that must not pass uncontradicted."

"But he is half drunk, or he would not have said it."

"It matters not, he *has* said it; and whatever may be his state now, he formed the opinion in sober earnest," and, so saying, he broke from the grasp of his brother-in-law, and walked straight towards Mr. Morton, who drew himself up, on seeing him approach, into an attitude of proud defiance.

"Mr. Morton," said Lacy, in a steady tone, "I could not avoid overhearing your reflections on my father, and I think it right to tell you that you have been misinformed."

"Misinformed, Sir!" repeated Mr. Morton, with a sneer. "You might have used a shorter word—you might have told me that I *lied*: that was your meaning, I suppose."

"My meaning, Sir," replied Lacy, "was to vindicate my father; and the words which I used, were such as I thought would be least offensive."

"I am greatly beholden to you for your consideration; but you need not have beaten about the bush. I spoke plainly, and so might you. I hate all double dealing; and if you thought my assertion false, you might have told me so at once."

"Then I will tell you," replied Lacy, "I *do* think your assertion false. I have that confidence in my father's honour, that I can never allow myself to believe that he has acted as you would insinuate."

"Insinuate, Sir! I assert it—but I won't stay to bandy explanations with a person that has given me the lie. After that, there is only one fit answer; and that is, to call for satisfaction."

"I will talk to you no longer," replied Lacy turning from him, "while you are in this intemperate state."

"Intemperate! Insolence! I think, Sir, you

had already insulted me enough, without presuming to hint that I was drunk: but you shall hear more from me. This shall not end here."

"It is not my intention that it should," replied Lacy. "You have made assertions which I deny: the truth of that denial I will establish. The vindication of my father shall be complete; and for that end will we meet again." And so saying, Lacy turned round, and suddenly walked from him out of the room.

Hartley who had stood near, an astonished witness of the past scene, quickly followed and soon came up to him, and they walked together towards their lodging, for some moments in silence.

Hartley was the first to speak.

"Well, Herbert," said he, with a sigh, as if he had only then begun to breathe freely, "the gauntlet is thrown down, with a vengeance."

Lacy made no answer.

"I am sorry for it," pursued Hartley; "these things are very unpleasant. How could he speak as he did of your father! It was quite proper to contradict him; but I am sorry the affair has turned out as it has. I don't think he was quite himself. Perhaps it would have been better not to have spoken to him just then."

"No, Hartley," replied Lacy, "I cannot agree with you. Every minute that his assertion remained uncontradicted in my hearing, would have added fresh weight to the calumny. The denial of the charge must spring instantly from the genuine impulse of an honest conviction, or it can be of no avail. A contrary line of conduct would have argued a degree of timid caution, which I should have considered a compromise of my father's character."

"Well, well, I believe you are right; but I still

wish that every thing could have been explained without a quarrel."

He was going to have added more, when Lacy laid his hand upon his arm with an air of reproof, which silenced him.

"Hartley—spare me this," said he: "you cannot enter into all my feelings; you cannot know how much I have sacrificed to a sense of duty, and what it has cost me to engage in a quarrel with Mr. Morton."

No immediate reply was made; but, after a few minutes' silence, Hartley added, in a low tone, with a stronger pressure of his companion's arm—

"Forget my remarks, and forgive them. They were ill-timed, to say the least of them. You have a friend in me that will stand by you, happen what may—you understand me—you may want a second—though God forbid it should come to that."

Lacy thanked him for the offer, and asked him to be the bearer of a letter; talked with him for a few minutes on the circumstances of the case; enjoined secrecy, that the quarrel might, if possible, be prevented from reaching the ears of his relations; and then desired to be left alone to the exercise of his own reflections.

And sad and troubled were those reflections; and dreadful was the view they opened. The parent of Agnes Morton was the public calumniator of his father! The former circumstance he must endeavour to forget; he must view him only in the latter capacity. And how to redress his father's wrongs?—this was the only question which a son should ask; and he did ask it to himself, in firmness and sincerity of spirit, and it directed him to a line of conduct which should uphold his father's cause without closing the door on reconciliation.—He saw that something decisive must instantly be done; that the imputations had long been secretly

laid, and had gained credit among their neighbours. Their recent coldness sufficiently proved it; and as Sir William was unfortunately little known, and had engaged no favourable prepossessions to discredit the calumny, Herbert felt it the more incumbent on him to use vigorous measures to rescue his name from disgrace. The result of his deliberation was the following letter to Mr. Morton:—

“SIR,

“You have uttered, in my hearing, and in no measured terms, statements respecting the conduct of my father, which, as I solemnly believed them to be untrue, I could not, for an instant, suffer to pass uncontradicted. Your expressions, though intentionally hostile, I do not believe to have been intentionally false. I give you the fullest credit for a sincere faith in the truth of that which you alleged; and can make great allowances for the irritation which such a conviction might naturally produce. But with whatever degree of confidence such allegations might be made, I feel myself equally bound to notice them, and to take the directest method of resisting your attacks.

“With this view, I require from you a letter—to which I must be allowed to give all possible publicity—which shall express a sorrow for the intemperate nature of your language, and a willingness to suspend your unfavourable judgment, and also to co-operate with me in disproving the slander, and tracing it to its source. This is the least reparation which one gentleman can offer to the injured honour of another; and I ask it with a sincere confidence that it will not be refused. I can scarcely anticipate a refusal from one whose gentlemanly feelings I am willing to estimate highly;

but I will not disguise from you the alternative which such a refusal must entail. Great as is my aversion to the system of duelling, and deeply as I should regret the necessity of a hostile meeting with you, I should not regard the rescue of my father's character from unmerited obloquy too dearly purchased even at such a price.

“I will not, however, dwell upon these possibilities of evil; I will hope for a happier termination to our differences: and I shall hardly regret this temporary misunderstanding, if it shall be the means of bringing you to a truer estimation of the character of him whom you have been so hastily and unadvisedly led to calumniate.”

The letter was written, shown to Hartley, and approved of by him; and within an hour from the time of Lacy's last angry parting from Mr. Morton, Hartley was on his way to deliver it to the latter.

CHAPTER IV.

The secret mischiefs that I set abroad,
I lay unto the grievous charge of others.

Richard III.

WE must now turn to Mr. Morton, who quitted the ordinary soon after Lacy, and retired to his apartment with feelings of no enviable description. Though somewhat heated with wine, and consequently in a state more than usually irritable, he could scarcely be said to have approached the verge of actual intoxication; and the passion of the moment was, therefore, soon permitted to subside into stubborn vexation, mixed with some portion of regret at the intemperate, or, what he feared might have seemed, ungentlemanly violence of his deportment. He had always a great value for appearances, and he dreaded having departed, even in a quarrel, from the external requisites of good breeding. He had a great deal of pride; but it was the pride of a little mind. He was angry with himself for having compromised his dignity; but he was only the more angry with the cause and witness of his error; and the more determined to regain what he thought his fallen height, by a spirited resistance to all expostulation.

In this frame of mind, he was joined by Sackville, who, though not in the room at the ordinary at the time of the quarrel, had received some obscure intelligence of what had passed, and now

came to learn from Mr. Morton the success of his own machinations. He had a difficult card to play: he had to repress inquiry into the origin of the disagreement, even while he pretended surprise and curiosity respecting its cause; and to inflame the anger of the contending parties while he ostensibly laboured to act the peace maker. Scarcely had he heard from Mr. Morton the story of his wrongs, than it was announced that Mr. Hartley was desirous of seeing the latter.

"He brings an apology, I suppose," said Sackville: "with your leave I will retire. You will doubtless think it more generous to receive the recantation alone."

Sackville went out, promising a speedy return, and Hartley was ushered in.

"Mr. Morton," said the latter, as he tendered a letter, "it is not my wish to press for a hasty answer to this letter; nor can I enter into any discussion of the circumstances which have produced it. I can only say that I regret them. You will reply at your leisure."

Mutual bows passed, and Hartley departed, leaving Mr. Morton to the perusal of Lacy's address. No sooner had he finished it, than Sackville returned, and the letter was put into his hands. His countenance, as he read it, assumed an appearance of mingled astonishment and grief.

"I am sorry for this," said he; "it is what I did not expect. It is a strange letter, half conciliatory, half—I was going to say, insulting; but I should be unwilling to think that he means to insult you. Do not let us give way to anger. Let us review his letter calmly."

"I *am* calm," said Mr. Morton, his features inflaming with anger as he spoke.

"If you were not," replied Sackville, laying his hand soothingly upon his arm, "it would not

much surprise me, considering, as I do, the provocation. I trust, however, that you can make considerable allowance for the indiscretion of a young man; though to be sure his youth ought to have made him more respectful; but young men will be hot and hasty. Yet, I dare say, he meant no great incivility—merely a contradiction.”

“Oh, no! merely a contradiction!” said Mr. Morton, with a splenetic smile.

“And if his manner was not offensive——”

“It *was* offensive,” interrupted Mr. Morton.

“I am truly sorry to hear it,” pursued Sackville. “He was probably very much irritated; and it is perhaps the consciousness of *that* which makes him say, that he can make great allowances for the irritation which *you* might have felt.”

“Insolence!” muttered Mr. Morton, stung to the quick by the artful mention of this galling passage. “The supposition of my irritation, Mr. Sackville, was a license of his own; and I can only regard it as an additional insult. Indeed the whole tenor of his letter is insulting. You know it is—and you cannot deny it.”

Sackville sighed, but attempted no denial. “I wish to make the best of the case,” said he. “I confess that Lacy and I are friends.—He owes me a service, and one is naturally partial to those whom one has befriended. In short, there is nobody with whom I more regret to see you at variance, than with him. But do not, my dear Sir, therefore suppose that I am inclined to neglect your interests, or forget your prior claims to my consideration. If I appear to regard your wrongs as slight, it is because I am anxious to avoid the consequences of a meeting. You see the conditions of the letter—an apology for what he calls the intemperate nature of your language—or—Good God! that it should come to that! a duel.

Oh! it must be prevented. I should be sorry that my anxiety for your safety should lead me to advise any humiliating step; but if it were possible by submission——”

“Submission! Mr. Sackville! do you know me so little as to expect——”

“Forgive me,” interrupted Sackville, rising in well feigned agitation. “I scarcely know what I am saying—perhaps I was too careless of your honour—I was thinking only of your safety. Lacy is young, and hot, and resolute. He is of an ancient and haughty family, and is himself proud and high spirited. He is little likely to yield, and I have always found him as good as his word.”

“Oh, I will believe him as terrible as you please,” replied Mr. Morton, with increasing anger. “You need not entertain me with a description of his qualifications for a duellist—spare me his feats with sword and pistol. You ought to know that considerations like these can make no difference in my resolution, and that I am not to be bullied with impunity, if he were fifty times the proud, resolute, high-spirited person, that you are pleased to represent him.”

He paced angrily across the room, while Sackville regarded him with a calm look of secret satisfaction. By assuming an imprudent eagerness to compose the quarrel, he had contrived at once to save his own credit, and so to inflame the pride of his companion, as to render reconciliation more difficult than before. Nothing was now wanting to the consummation of his projects but a duel between Mr. Morton and Lacy by which Sackville hoped to effect the perpetual estrangement of the two families.

“I have been considering,” said he after a silence of a few minutes, “whether it is not possible to arrange this unfortunate affair so as to avoid

a meeting, consistently with a regard for your honour, which, however anxious for your safety I would be the last to compromise."

"And what do you suggest?" said Mr. Morton.

"Would to God I knew how to answer you. You will not apologize—you must not fight him. Why return him any answer? Surely he will not dare to post you?"

"And can any friend of mine advise me to incur the possibility of such a disgrace?"

"No, no!" exclaimed Sackville, hastily, and as if much agitated and perplexed. "I do not advise it; I do not know what to advise. This circumstance agitates and distresses me. I have only one feeling—for your safety—one wish—to prevent all evil consequences; but I am not capable of offering advice," and he turned away with well affected imbecility and dejection, leaving Mr. Morton to the uncontrolled guidance of those angry passions, which the insidious interposition of his false friend had goaded almost to frenzy.

Stung with a bitter sense of his wrongs, the latter, after one more angry glance at the least pacific parts of Lacy's letter, hastily took up pen and paper, and wrote the following answer.

"I accept your alternative. I do not shrink from the publicity with which you threaten me; but I will at least take care that you shall not publish a submission. I will not disappoint your evident wish for a hostile meeting. You will find me ready at six to-morrow. I claim the privilege of the challenged, in choosing time, weapons, and place of encounter. My weapons, will be pistols. My second will arrange the rest."

The letter was written, and directed, before Sackville would choose to exhibit any consciousness of the proceedings of Mr. Morton, and he

started as if from a dream, when the latter approached him with a letter in his hand.

"Here is my answer", said he. "May I ask you to deliver it?"

"With pleasure," replied Sackville "if its contents are pacific."

"Do I understand you correctly?" exclaimed Morton. "Is your consent to bear my letter only conditional?"

"It is only conditional," replied Sackville. "I can be the bearer of no hostile answer; but do not, because I decline this office, doubt my friendship and willingness to assist you. The service which I once rendered to Lacy would make any such intervention extremely painful to me; and I trust that your kindness will spare me the trial. If I were the only person who could perform this office, the case would be different, and I would willingly make the sacrifice; but I am neither the only person, nor the most proper one. You have a son-in-law, who has a prior claim, to have his services required. Lord Malvern, I am sure, will feel your wrongs as deeply as I can do, and he is more nearly connected with the cause of your misunderstanding. The quarrel, (if I may be allowed to say so,) is partly his, and he might feel hurt at not being applied to."

These arguments were sufficient; Mr. Morton, proud of his connection with the Rodboroughs, was glad to gain their co-operation in a quarrel, which if the merits of the case were examined, really belonged much more to them, than to himself. Permission was therefore given to Sackville, to request that Lord Malvern would be the ostensible intervening party between the challenger and the challenged; and so ingeniously was the case represented by Sackville, that Lord Malvern, full of indignation at the wrongs of his fa-

ther-in-law, fully acceded to every hostile measure in which he was required to co-operate.

About two hours, had now elapsed since the meeting at the ordinary. Lord Malvern had presented himself to Lacy, as the friend and second of Mr. Morton: had given his letter, and had retired to adjust with Hartley the preliminaries of the meeting; when Sackville having ascertained to what stage the business had advanced, at length repaired, with the studied appearance of haste and consternation, to the presence of Lacy, with the ostensible purpose of protesting against those extremities, which he trusted it was now too late to prevent.

After many exclamations of sorrow and surprise "Lacy," said he, with a well-assumed look of deep affliction, "it is a cruel circumstance for me that such a misunderstanding should have occurred between my two best friends, and that I should not have been able to make up the quarrel: but I hope it may still be possible. I know that you are not implacable, nor, I trust, is Morton. I am willing to think that he may be brought to listen to overtures. Perhaps some slight acknowledgment——"

"Acknowledgment! Of what?" said Lacy; "of the justice and generosity of his false attack upon my father's character? Of his public calumny of an absent person? Consider, Sackville, what you are proposing; and do not, in your eagerness for a reconciliation, so completely overlook the obstacles which lie in the way to it. You say you are willing to believe that Mr. Morton may be brought to listen to overtures: perhaps he may, but we have yet to learn, by whom those overtures can be made. I have shown a willingness to excuse his fault—and here," pointing to Morton's letter, "is the reward of my forbearance."

Sackville sighed, and looked imploringly at Lacy. "Forgive me," said he, "if I seem officious—I wished, if possible, to be the bearer of some message which might lead to an amicable arrangement."

"Have you any authority from Mr. Morton, to say that such a message would be favourably received!"

Sackville hesitated, and seemed anxious to avoid the question; and on Lacy's repeating it, answered, despondingly, in the negative.

"Then, where is your basis for an amicable arrangement?"

Sackville made no answer; and turned away with an audible sigh, which was meant to convey that there was none. It did convey that impression most strongly to the mind of Lacy: and thus had Sackville under the guise of a peace-maker, artfully contrived to incense both parties still more against each other, and to lead them to the belief that no further step remained for either than to fight. He had effected this without committing himself by any assertion that could be repeated to the detriment of his plans; and he had paralyzed and precluded the efforts of the seconds, by giving them to understand that the office of peace-maker was peculiarly his; and that his exertions, though aided by the advantage of a friendship with both of the parties, were entirely unsuccessful.

Thus deprived of the sincere good offices of their true friends, and exposed to the deep-laid treachery of a false one, the hostile parties advanced without one efficient check towards that unhalloved system, that remnant of barbarous contention, which the rules of modern society still prescribe as the best mode of appeasing the wounded feelings, and re-establishing the injured character, of its most elevated members.

CHAPTER V.

Le duel est le triomphe de la mode, et l'endroit où elle a exercé son empire avec plus d'éclat.

BRUYERE.

THOUGH it was known to several that angry words had passed between Mr. Morton and Herbert Lacy, yet the knowledge of the subsequent challenge, and its acceptance, was confined to five persons—the principals, seconds, and Sackville.—The Rodboroughs, Lady Malvern, and Agnes, had returned from the course to Westcourt and Dods-well, and could not be apprized of the circumstance. There was more danger of discovery on the part of Herbert's relations; for Lady Lacy and his sister were still staying in the town, and he and Hartley could not avoid seeing them that night. Hartley, though with a heavy heart, prudently resolved to absent himself, by fulfilling his duties at the ball, a woeful epilogue to that of the preceding evening. Herbert was perfectly successful in assuming the appearance of cheerfulness and composure; and quietly pleading an engagement on the morrow, as the cause of his return to Lacy Park, he mounted his horse and rode home. He found Sir William still up, engaged with a book that interested him, and little disposed to talk. He merely observed to his son that his coming was unexpected; made no inquiry about the races, concerning which, he rather piqued himself upon

showing no curiosity—and continued to read in silence.

“And this,” thought Herbert, as he sat near his father, shading with his hand his agitated countenance, “and this, perhaps, is our last interview, and it must pass in indifference and silence; and I must utter nothing of all that I would say, nay, must talk with an air of carelessness, and take, perhaps, an eternal leave, as if we should meet on the morrow.”

His agitation was very great, and if Sir William had not been much absorbed, he must have observed it.

“I must command myself,” thought Lacy, “and break through this horrible silence.” “Have you heard, Sir?” said he, “that——”

“My dear Herbert, I have heard nothing,” interrupted the baronet, rather drily: “what should I hear in this cell of mine? Hermits have little to do with news: but come,” he added, closing his book, “I will hear you talk for five minutes.—What was your piece of information?”

“That Lord Rodborough has purchased the Bloxwich property.”

“I know that,” replied Sir William.

“And that the title is defective.”

“I know that too.”

Herbert felt a sudden chill of ominous dread at these words; and confident as he had been of the integrity of his father, it was with trembling eagerness that he inquired how long he had possessed this knowledge—the answer re-assured him.

“A day or two,” was the reply; and Herbert breathed more freely.

“And you never knew it before?” he added.

“Certainly, never—how should I?”

“I do not know—perhaps Allen——”

“Allen? he tell me? no, not he: besides, con-

sider, my dear fellow, that, if I had really known the circumstance, though I should have acted prudently in refusing the purchase, I could not, with propriety, have appeared to waive it in favour of another—that would have been dishonest—a piece of practical equivocation—I hope you view it in that light.”

“Exactly, Sir, I perfectly agree with you.”

Sir William then rose to retire, and Herbert felt with anguish that the terrible moment of parting had arrived. The baronet stopped to contemplate for an instant the haggard countenance of his son.

“Herbert,” said he, “you look ill. You have been jaded and harassed with these races. You are a sight to moralize upon—a standing warning to all who make a toil of pleasure. But I cannot stay to moralize. You want rest, and so do I. Good night! Why, how now? have you any thing to say to me?”

“No, Sir—nothing.”

“Why then, good night? Nay, surely you do not take me for your partner? that squeeze of the hand must have been meant for her. Is it some new divinity? or the old one reinstalled? Well, well, make your disclosures at your own good time, only do not let it be now. Come, what are we lingering about? once more—good night.”

“Good night!” repeated Herbert, almost inaudibly, and fixed to the spot, and scarcely breathing, followed his father with his eyes till the closing door concealed him.

“Gone!” he murmured to himself, “and I may never see him more; and this perhaps was an eternal leave-taking!” He threw himself on a chair, and hid his face in his hands, in a short paroxysm of mental agony.

After a while he arose, and with a countenance calmer than before, “The struggle is past,” said

he: "now to my duty." The task he had enjoined himself, and which he now prepared to execute, was a severe one, and demanded all his firmness. It was to inform his father, by letter, of all that had passed, and that still was to ensue, and the motives which influenced his conduct. This latter part of his address is the only one which it is necessary to transcribe.

"I do not know," he said, "how far my violent mode of vindication may meet with your deliberate approval. I might perhaps at the time be acting more under the influence of mere feeling than I was willing to believe; but still, when I calmly review my conduct, I am not disposed to condemn it.

"Do not however, suppose that I am therefore an advocate for duelling. I think that the instances are very few in which it is justifiable. I question whether I would ever call it more than a venial offence; but I consider that the degrees of criminality vary greatly, and that every case must be judged upon its own merits. I acknowledge, with respect, the authority of the law as a vindicator of wrongs; but these are wrongs, which the law cannot vindicate—and wounds which it cannot heal; and the customs of society have recognised this system as the only remedy in such cases. A more perfect state of society would probably have dispensed with such an ordeal: but we cannot change the constitution of the world, and must avail ourselves of such measures as are suited to the exigences of the time.

"In the present instance, an amicable inquiry might doubtless satisfactorily confute the calumny; but if the accuser persist in his hostility, and if I cannot call the attention of the public to a quiet examination of the case, I can at least show them the firmness of my own convictions. This practi-

cal appeal may have its effect upon minds that have not sufficient candour to be accessible to any other. I am now aware that the poison has long been secretly working when we were unconcious of it, and that some decided measure is necessary to check its progress. I am diffident of my own judgment, and of the solidity of these reasons: but I have another, which, bound as I feel to open to you my whole heart, I will not scruple to reveal.

“It was impossible,—it would have been wrong that you should not have been acquainted with the injurious reflections which had been cast upon your character. You must have known them in course of time, and knowing them, it is not improbable that you might have challanged your aggressor. This I could prevent only by forestalling your intentions, and rendering myself a hostage, and I am thankful to Providence for the chance which has enabled me to do so. I trust I shall meet my opponent without bearing with me any evil passion. I view him as a misguided person, and much as he has injured you, I feel rather grief than anger at his delusion. I wish him no injury, and shall endeavour not to wound him.”

After having performed this task, his mind seemed unburthened of a load, and invigorated by the trial he had undergone. As the flow of his spirits abated, a sense of bodily fatigue came over him; and having offered his accustomed prayer at the throne of mercy, with more than usual fervour and solemnity, he threw himself upon a bed to snatch a short repose. Roused by no accusing conscience he soon yielded to the hand of nature and sleep surprised him pondering on the phenomenon of his own tranquillity.

When he awoke it was yet night, but a dim, grey light, the precursor of morning, was faintly

appearing in the east. No living creature had yet given signs of life; nothing met his eye but the distant gleam, a solemn monitor of the lapse of time, and all between was dark and dubious as his own fate. He arose and looked out, and fixed his eyes intently on the brightening horizon.

“Soon,” thought he, “all this scene will teem with light and life as usual—while I—I may never see it more, but living or dead, I shall have performed a painful duty.”

With gentle steps he quitted his apartment, and sought the room where his father usually sat. He deposited his letter on the table; looked round at many well known objects, now faintly visible through the gloom, and then silently retired. In a few minutes he had quitted the house, mounted his horse, which he had privately ordered to be ready for him, and was on his road to Henbury. He dismounted at an inn near the outskirts of the town, and walked to the place where Hartley had appointed to meet him. As he approached the spot, he heard footsteps behind him, and on turning, saw his brother-in-law. Their only greeting was a silent pressure of the hand, and for a while no word was uttered. The object of their meeting was a topic which they approached with repugnance; and every other seemed irrelevant.

“We are before our time,” was Hartley’s first observation.

“We are, and it is best.”

“Is your father informed?”

“No: happily he knows nothing. My mother and Emily——?”

“They have no suspicions.”

“Thank God! Charles, if I fall, convey to them every assurance of my sincere affection; say, that my last, best wishes were for their happiness—

say to them—but I cannot express what I would—it is difficult to clothe in words all that one feels at such a moment as this—but you know my sentiments, and can supply what is wanting.”

Hartley pressed his hand—but tears filled his eyes, and for a while he could not speak. “God forbid,” said he at length, “that such a necessity should ever come. Do not think so gloomily of the case—why look on the dark side? It is exposing yourself to a needless trial.”

“Nay not needless,” replied Lacy. “I would have no calamity come upon me unawares. There is neither sense nor courage in shutting one’s eyes to possible evils; and I trust I can look steadily at the worst—and now let us go to the ground.”

A few minutes’ walk brought them to the appointed place of meeting, a retired field, selected on account of its remoteness from both house and road. It was a grey, chill, autumnal morning—the sun had just risen, and was dimly appearing like a red globe through the dense mass of vapours which then lay heavy on the horizon. No breeze-ruffled the trees—scarce a leaf stirred—not an insect was on the wing; and silence seemed to reign over the land, invaded only by the solemn measured croakings of the unseen raven. The cattle lay quiescent, their heads barely emerging above a white veil of mist, which was spread over the surface of the earth, giving to the neighbouring fields the character of lakes, and making the low hedges rise around them with all the dignity of forests. It was nature under its most placid, and, at the same time, least cheering aspect.

Scarcely had Lacy and his companion entered and surveyed the scene, than two figures appeared to advance through the mist, from the opposite corner of the field. These were, Lord Malvern and Mr. Morton. The latter presently stopped.

Lacy also fell back; and the two seconds advanced to make the preliminary arrangements. Many words had not passed between them, before another person was seen to approach, and they found themselves joined by Sackville. Hartley received him with an air of coldness and surprise.

"You come, I conclude as the friend of Mr. Morton," said he. "He probably remembers the proverb, 'in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.'"

"I trust that such will be the case," replied Sackville, calmly, "and not to him only. I come as the friend to both parties—I will not give up the last chance of reconciliation."

The seconds shook their heads. "If reconciliation had been possible," observed Lord Malvern, "we should not have met here," and without more words, they proceeded to make the preparations for the combat.

The ground was measured, the pistols loaded, the signal settled, and the parties had taken their respective stations. Sackville had once more demanded in terms which he knew would be repugnant to the feelings of each, whether either party was willing to prevent the possible effusion of blood, by making any timely concessions. A stern denial was their mutual answer. The seconds exchanged a sorrowing look—the signal was given—and Morton and Lacy fired at the same instant.

Neither took any aim, or even looked at his opponent. Their eyes were fixed upon their seconds in expectation of the signal, and their pistols lowered until it was given. Lacy's pistol, though his arm was straight, was directed upwards at the time he fired, by a slight elevation of the wrist, a circumstance, which however material, escaped the observation of the seconds. The smoke, ad-

ded to the mistiness of the atmosphere, rendered it difficult, at the first instant, to perceive the effect of the fire. It was, however, immediately ascertained, that each combatant still stood erect in his place; and an exclamation of thankfulness burst involuntarily from the by-standers.

Lord Malvern, Hartley, and Sackville, then advanced, and the latter inquired aloud if both parties were satisfied. Mr. Morton made no answer. Lacy stood immovable, with arms folded across his breast. His mien was humble, rather than haughty: his countenance was very pale, and its expression was rather that of calm resignation, than the indignant stubbornness of a combatant.

"I came here," said he, in a low, but resolute tone, "to vindicate my father, and I repeat my first demands. I ask of Mr. Morton, that he shall publicly express a sorrow for his accusations, and a willingness to suspend his judgment; and that he shall consent to co-operate with me, in tracing, and disproving the slander which he allowed himself to utter. This is still my demand. Mr. Morton hears it: let him answer."

Mr. Morton's irritation had been gradually cooling since the period of the challenge, and he was now on the point of returning a conciliatory answer; when a look from Sackville, a look addressed to him alone, and bearing in it scorn and wonder, rekindled in an instant all the angry pride which had burned so fiercely the preceding night. An instantaneous change of sentiments ensued; he scowled defiance upon Lacy, and sternly rejected his conditions. The seconds wished to compose the difference; but each feared to compromise the honour of his friend, and each consequently scrupled to speak. There was no alternative but to fire again. Another pistol was put into the hand of each of the opponents; and the seconds drew back, and again prepared to give the signal.

At this instant, Lacy was seen to advance towards Mr. Morton, but with uncertain steps, and a bewildered air, as if not conscious what he did. Mr. Morton started, and uttered an exclamation: and the sudden and strange demeanour of both the combatants, was regarded with surprise by the seconds.

"Keep your ground," cried Lord Malvern.

"He is pale—he staggers!" said Sackville.

"Blood! I see blood!" exclaimed Hartley,—
"he is wounded—save him!—save him!" and springing forward, he caught Lacy in his arms as he was sinking senseless to the ground. He had been wounded by the first fire, and had concealed the circumstance that he might better effect that vindication to which he had devoted himself.

CHAPTER VI.

Le commun des hommes va de la colere, a l'injure: quelques uns en usent autrement; ils offensent, et puis se fachent.

BRUYERE.

It would be difficult adequately to describe the effect of this unexpected and terrible discovery. All was grief and consternation. The angry pride of Mr. Morton was suddenly transformed into repentant sorrow; and with a quick revulsion of feeling, he bitterly bewailed aloud the unhappy chance which had rendered him the victor.

"Oh that I had fallen!" he exclaimed, in a tone of agony, as he knelt by Lacy, anxiously assisting to restore his wandering senses. Sackville pressed him to depart, and consider his own safety; but he was deaf to all such entreaties.

"I will not stir until he revives," said he.—
"Let me at least know that I am not quite a murderer."

"Thank God! he does revive," said Hartley.

"He does! he does! God be thanked!" exclaimed Mr. Morton. "Mr. Lacy, I was hasty—I was wrong—I yield to your conditions."

"Do not linger—save yourself," said Sackville, seizing him by the arm.

"Away!" said Mr. Morton, "and let me make my atonement. Mr. Lacy, I abjure my suspicions of your father—I accede to all you asked."

Lacy's consciousness had returned, and though

a partial oblivion of the past attended his first recovery, he was sufficiently himself again to be aware of the important purport of Mr. Morton's words. He faintly signified his acceptance of the concession, and stretched out his hand in pledge of reconciliation. The pledge was promptly received; and the hands, that a few minutes ago had been armed for mutual destruction, were now joined in earnest of returning friendship.

Strange is the sudden revulsion of feeling, which powerful circumstances produce. Such happy results form one of the strongest among the practical arguments that are adduced in favour of the otherwise scarcely defensible system of duelling; and in opposition to such as object that the influence of these emotions is too sudden and violent to be lasting, it may be said, that the instances are not unfrequent, of those who have met in this hostile manner having lived long afterwards on terms of friendship.

The attentions of the whole party to Lacy were unremitted. A surgeon who, under pledge of secrecy, had been engaged by the seconds to be in readiness, and who had remained apart at a little distance, to wait the issue of the fire, now approached to afford his assistance and advice. The wound was happily discovered not to be dangerous, and Lacy's temporary insensibility, which had struck the party with such alarm, was pronounced to have proceeded only from the effusion of blood. His safe removal was now the object uppermost in their minds, and a carriage having been providently ordered beforehand to be stationed at a convenient distance from the place of meeting, Lacy was soon placed in it, to be conveyed to his brother-in-law's apartments in the town.

Though too weak to combat any of the arrangements that were made respecting his disposal, Lacy

was anxious to avoid all chance of sudden alarm to his mother and sister, and proposed to be conveyed elsewhere; but Hartley, influenced by the idea that his brother-in-law would be better there than any where else, overruled his objections, saying that they must know some time or other, and might as well be informed at first. The carriage conveying Lacy moved at a foot's pace towards the town, and considerable time elapsed before it arrived at the house.

Hartley, who had walked thither, arrived a few minutes before it, and was engaged in communicating the intelligence to Lady Lacy and Mrs. Hartley, when Herbert entered the house, assisted by Sackville and the surgeon. Not knowing where to conduct their charge, they opened the door of the nearest room, which happened to be the breakfast room, where Miss Hartley was sitting alone. She rose hastily, with some surprise at the unexpected intrusion; a surprise which soon grew into alarm as she cast her eyes upon the figure of Lacy, to whom, she saw at once, that something serious had happened.

Lacy wished to retire, but Sackville would not allow him; and directing the surgeon to lead him to the sofa, he advanced towards Miss Hartley, and in a few words explained the whole circumstance, of which, not having yet seen her brother, she was totally ignorant. Naturally timid, and endued with little strength of mind, hearing suddenly of the actual occurrence of horrors which she had hitherto thought almost fictitious, and which her imagination instantly magnified, and seeing in the pale countenance of Lacy enough to warrant her worst fears, she found the shock too great for her feeble nerves; and scarcely had Sackville uttered ten words, than she turned pale and fainted—Sackville caught her as she was about to fall, and Lacy him-

self, forgetting his wound, rushed forward to her assistance.

Lady Lacy, her daughter, and Heartley, entered the room immediately afterwards; and instead of finding a sympathizing group round the wounded Lacy, saw a new and unexpected sufferer in Miss Hartley: and all the interest and compassion which was due to Herbert; suddenly transferred to her. The perplexity which it produced, was, perhaps, to them a fortunate circumstance, and spared them from much needless anxiety; for they could not, on seeing Lacy, interested in the temporary sufferings of another, and seemingly regardless of his own situation, any longer entertain those extreme apprehensions which their imaginations, in the first instance, had been rather prone to magnify. They expected to have found Herbert almost senseless, and scarcely able to speak or move; and their first emotion, on now beholding him so engaged, was one of joyful surprise: but grief quickly followed; and greatly as their first fears had exceeded the truth, they still found in his actual state, much cause for lamentation.

Sir William Lacy soon arrived: his coming had been somewhat retarded by an interview with Mr. Morton, in the presence of Lord Malvern. Immediately upon Herbert's being taken from the ground, under the care of Hartley and Sackville, Mr. Morton formed the sudden resolution of going to Lacy Park, to inform the baronet of his son's state, and to offer, in person, his recantation. —It was a resolution formed before the tide of generous sorrow, and self-condemnation had begun to revert, and when atonement was felt to be, not only a duty, but a pleasure.

On his arrival, he found Sir William Lacy in much agitation. He had read his son's letter, and was on the point of setting out for Henbury. The

interview was short, but satisfactory; and, as it took place in the presence of Lord Malvern, it was effectual in removing those aspersions which had been hastily cast upon Sir William's conduct. Thus, scarcely had the baronet become informed of the attack which had been made upon him, than he received an atonement for the injury, and shook hands with the person whom, a few minutes before, he had considered as his mortal enemy.

The meeting between Sir William and Herbert was marked by much emotion on either side. Joy, at finding his son out of danger, and parental pride and gratitude for his noble defence of his reputation; the excitement, too occasioned by his interview with Mr. Morton, and the effects of the agitation he had undergone upon reading Herbert's letter, all now combined to overcome his firmness: he struggled, but in vain, to prevent the burst of overcharged feelings; till, at length, bending his head upon the shoulder of Herbert, he wept audibly.

After some time had passed, and their feelings had subsided into comparative calmness, Sir William, having expressed his warmest thanks to his son, for the promptness and self-devotion with which he had undertaken his defence, added, "Herbert, after what I have said, you will not, I hope, accuse me of coldness and ingratitude; and I may venture, without hurting you, to take another view of what has passed. Let us, in all circumstances, whether of great or little moment, proportion our means to the end we wish to gain. Do not let us incur sacrifices for which the object, when gained, will be no sufficient compensation. To rebut a slander is certainly desirable, but there are many ways of effecting it. The one which you chose, my dear son, was of very doubtful issue, and involved the liability of a sacrifice, for which

no success could have compensated. I am glad to find my character vindicated; but I cannot look back without a shudder at the peril through which that purpose was effected. Consider how much dearer, how much more valuable, you are, and ought to be to me, than mere popular estimation. Your loss could not have been repaid, even if the public had decreed me a statue of gold. But you acted to save my honour, and our honour, we are told, should be dearer than our life."

"And should it not?"

"Perhaps it should; but think first what you mean by your honour, and do not let us confound the shadow with the substance. Is there no difference between committing a dishonourable action, and being unjustly charged with one? Is there any moral guilt in being slandered?—Is there any moral obligation to clear one's-self at all hazards? There are too many, Herbert, who lose sight of these distinctions—who live only on public opinion, and are so accustomed to estimate their own conduct by its effect upon others, that they can scarcely imagine any difference between being honourable, and being thought so. I do not mean to say that the desire of approbation is not an estimable, or, I would rather say, a useful feeling: if not quite a virtue, it is the guarantee of many, and society owes much that is valuable to its existence; but it is a sentiment to which, perhaps, in consideration of its great results, we are apt to attach rather an undue importance. I do not wish entirely to convert you, Herbert; I do not wish to make you quite as regardless of the opinion of the world as I am myself, for, perhaps, I have fallen into the opposite extreme. I was always rather careless of what others thought and said of me, and it is a fault which increases with age. At your time of life, to be solicitous, even to excess,

of the approbation of others, is the better excess of the two. Do not think that I disapprove of this sentiment—in you I know it is the parent of much that is generous and noble; but there is no subject upon which more romantic and specious declamation has been uttered, and of a kind very captivating to young imaginations; and it can do you no harm to hear this opposed by a few plain opinions, from one whose enthusiasm has been cooled by sixty winters.”

Mr. Morton's full recantation, together with the representations of Sackville, who wished to stifle all inquiry, prevented Sir William Lacy from examining very narrowly into the origin of the mistake from which the injurious charge had arisen. Sackville, who possessed, to admiration, the art of leading others into an opinion, without seeming directly to advise them, instilled into the minds of both parties a feeling that it was more generous and decorous to apologize, and forgive and forget, than to enter into a scrupulous investigation of the facts which had led either of them into error. In the slight inquiry which did take place the weight of the blame was made to rest upon Allen; but so dexterous an obscurity and confusion was thrown over the whole case, that the parties, were soon glad to take refuge in a general assumption of the thing to be proved, from the tedious intricacies of its development.

Let us turn for a moment to Agnes Morton, than whom none can be supposed to have felt a more intense interest in the singular transactions of these two days. Her situation would have been agonizing indeed, had she been all along conscious of that which was to happen; but she had remained in fortunate ignorance—not, indeed, of the violence of her father's ill-will towards the Lacys, but of the latter excesses into which it had

led him. The knowledge of this part of the history came upon her after the termination of the duel; but it was so carefully broken to her, and all the more gratifying circumstance of the reconciliation, and of Lacy's state of safety, were so judiciously brought foremost to her knowledge, that the grief and anxiety which she otherwise would have felt, were in a great measure removed. She could no longer wish for the society of Lacy; indeed it was a trial from which she rather desired to be exempt; yet still it was a satisfaction to her to find that no enmity separated the families.

What she found most painful was the necessity of disguising the interest she took in the progress of Lacy's recovery, particularly when in the presence of Sackville, who was the usual channel of information respecting him. Strong as was her resolution to forswear her unfortunate attachment, and think only on her present engagement, she almost wished, at times, that this resolution would be confirmed in her by an engagement on the part of Lacy; and that she might be encouraged, even by his example, to forget what had once been their mutual feelings. This melancholy wish, had soon a prospect of being accomplished to its fullest extent.

CHAPTER VII.

It many times falls out that we deem ourselves much deceived in others, because we first deceived ourselves.

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

THAT good often springs out of evil has, from time immemorial, been the just observation of many philosophers; and Lady Lacy, though very widely removed from a philosopher, was disposed to be of the same opinion, when she saw that the unfortunate circumstance of her son's wound had the happy effect of furthering the desired union between him and Charlotte Hartley. It had been settled by her, at the time of Herbert's removal to Lacy Park, that as he was fond of society, and could not now stir from home to obtain it, it would be more agreeable for him if their family party were a little augmented. Emily and her husband were therefore desired to come and stay at Lacy; and as their sister was then with them, what so natural as that she should be invited too? Lady Lacy did not scruple to impart to Mrs. Hartley her wish that Charlotte and Herbert should be thrown a little together; and that Lady, who was cautious of offering any opposition on this point, or of questioning the desirableness of the object, gave her entire concurrence.

Having gained this point, Lady Lacy confidently anticipated the success that was to follow, and complacently reviewed all the favourable circum-

stances that were infallibly to lead to it. Herbert would not be able to stir, much from the house, or absent himself from Miss Hartley's society. His situation too was a very interesting one; and if Charlotte had a grain of proper sensibility, how could she fail to fall in love with him? Of course she must—and, assuming this to be the case, if Herbert had a grain of gratitude, how could he fail to be equally enamoured in his turn?

This reasoning seemed very satisfactory; but Lady Lacy had, for the support of her conclusions, something more than probabilities. She could also build upon the occurrence of favourable circumstances which had already fallen under her own observation. Of these, foremost in importance was the fact of Miss Hartley's fainting, when she first came to the knowledge of Herbert's disaster.—This, to Lady Lacy, seemed conclusive—an unequivocal proof of ardent attachment. To all attempts to attribute it to sudden fright, she was perfectly inaccessible. She knew it was something more, and could soon remember a great many instances in which Miss Hartley had been suddenly frightened, and had not fainted. She had been alone in a room with a mouse, and in a summer-house with two toads. She had been overturned in a pony-carriage, and once very nearly thrown from her horse—and in none of those instances had she fainted;—therefore, fright alone could not make her faint. And then followed the important corollary, that nothing but all-powerful love could cause so violent an emotion.

Herbert thought otherwise—perhaps, in a great measure, because he hoped so. He had every wish to retard the discovery of Miss Hartley's attachment to him; and the consciousness of this wish made him sometimes fear that he was guilty of perverse blindness in giving so little importance to

those indications which had struck others so forcibly. It was not merely the opinion of Lady Lacy—his sister was also of the same way of thinking. Hartley, though he alluded to it very slightly, always seemed to treat it as a matter of course; and there was something in the manner, and, occasionally, in the words of Sackville, who was now a frequent visiter, which showed that he also entertained a similar belief.

Nor was this the only force that arrayed itself against his solitary hopes and opinions. Mrs. Poole, who came to spend a few days at Lacy Park, also contributed her mite of intelligent looks and ambiguous speeches; and though last, not least in the lists was Luscombe. This gentleman, ever since the duel, had taken a great interest in the situation of Lacy, had called repeatedly to inquire after him, and had shown such an earnest desire to make himself useful and agreeable, that Lacy, though he had not previously liked the man, whom he regarded as a mere parasite, could not help being won by his attentions.

These attentions soon produced, what Luscombe doubtless expected, an invitation to stay at Lacy Park. The invitation was accepted; and as its term was undefined, Sir William and his lady were favoured with his company for a much longer time than they had originally contemplated. He, however, made himself a pleasant inmate; for, being accustomed to spend at least nine-tenths of his time in other people's houses, he had become habitually dexterous in the act of paying for his reception in the small coin of little attentions; and that person must have been very impracticable, with whom, he could not have discovered some mode of ingratiating himself.

Luscombe afforded Herbert a further confirmation of the truth of that which he had gathered

from the hints and looks of the rest of the party. It was insinuated to him in all tones, the bantering, the serious, the lively, and the confidential; and as Luscombe appeared to Herbert to have taken a very just estimate of the qualities and capacity of Miss Hartley whom he evidently did not admire, there arose a presumption that his observation might have been equally accurate upon this other point. Lacy, however, was quite satisfied with his confirmation of the unwelcome truth, without his endeavouring to promote it, which it seemed that, out of his great friendship, he was rather disposed to do.

On entering the drawing-room, one day, Herbert found Luscombe and Miss Hartley *tête-à-tête*, standing together near the fire, and apparently earnestly engaged in conversation. As he entered the dialogue suddenly ceased. Miss Hartley turned away her head, blushed, seemed hurried, and soon left the room. Luscombe also coloured slightly, and appeared for a moment ill at ease; but his usual smiling composure soon returned, and was perfectly re-established by the time that Miss Hartley had departed.

“We were talking about you,” said he to Lacy, with a good humoured look of significance. “I was saying I thought you looked much better, and she said indeed she thought you did. She seemed very anxious about you: she asked me how long people generally were in recovering from a wound with a bullet, and I told her that it depended entirely upon the nature of the wound, and a variety of circumstances.”

“In short you proved her question to be a silly one, and she was blushing at your reproof.”

“No, it was not exactly so. Just when you came in I was joking with her about a picture. We had found a head that she admired, and she

pretended not to see that there was any likeness in it to you, and so I was saying—”

“My dear fellow,” said Herbert, somewhat vexed, yet hardly knowing how to be angry, “pray don’t treat me with the whole detail. It was perhaps more than enough to have entertained Miss Hartley with such a subject; I am sure you can find much better ones for your *tête-à-têtes* than me.”

Luscombe looked distressed at the observation.

“I did not mean to hurt you,” pursued Lacy. “I know what you did was well intended;” and here the conversation ceased.

Lacy was not disposed to be credulous, and he would probably have withstood all this array of looks, hints, and surmises, if he had not been still further urged onward to belief by the behaviour of Miss Hartley herself. There was an evident change in her manner: she used to be lively and thoughtless; she was now much graver in her general demeanour, and not unfrequently pensive, and abstracted. Towards him she no longer showed that almost sisterly frankness and familiarity which their long acquaintance had rendered natural. There was an additional shade of reserve, and occasionally a slight appearance of conscious flutter and agitation, for which he knew not how to account by any other supposition than the one he dreaded. He had seen her blush when he approached, and withdraw her eyes when met by his; yet his society was by no means avoided; it rather seemed to be sought, as if more agreeable to her than ever. Her conscious timidity of manner seemed to increase, at the same time that she was lingering in his presence, and daily affording him additional opportunities for a *tête-à-tête*.

On these occasions Lacy sometimes observed that

she was considerably abstracted, and much less attentive to what he said, than to something which she seemed desirous of saying herself.

One day, when they were alone, Lacy was particularly struck by these peculiarities in her manner, and by an increased appearance of anxious abstraction. He began to talk to her, but found her too deeply engaged with her own thoughts to give him much of her attention. Thinking, therefore, that his conversation might be only an annoyance, he ceased, and taking up a book, began to read. He had not, however, been long thus engaged, when Miss Hartley, who would not attend to him before, now seemed anxious to draw him into conversation. She cast several glances at his book, but Lacy did not seem to observe her, and read on in silence.

"Is that poetry?" said she, at last, finding that looks were of no avail.

"No; humble prose," said Lacy, "and of no very amusing kind."

"You like poetry best?" said Miss Hartley, inquiringly.

"I hardly know," replied Lacy; "perhaps it does give me most pleasure at the time; but I should no more wish to read only poetry, than to live upon nothing but peaches."

"Very true," said Miss Hartley, as if she was not thinking about it; "and whose poetry is the best?"

"That is a question of mere taste, which nine persons out of ten might answer differently. To be sure, there are some few poets whom all would probably agree in classing among the first. Milton is one of them."

"Ah!—yes. Milton—he wrote *Paradise Lost*. What a pity it is that *Paradise Lost* is so shocking!"

"Do you think it shocking?" replied Lacy, with a smile.

"Yes; it is all about—devils," said she, lowering her voice at the last word, as if she thought it hardly a proper one.

"Nay; not all," said Lacy. "There is something about angels, too."

"Is there? well I read almost two whole *cantos*, and it seemed to be all about devils. I was told it was quite a proper book, but I did not like to go on with it. It is not the sort of reading I prefer."

"And what sort do you prefer?" said Lacy, who anticipated some amusement from her opinions.

"Oh dear! I hardly know how to tell you;—yes, I think I like poetry that has more heart and feeling in it, and seems more natural and simple, and comes more home to one, and describes thoughts, and ideas, and situations that might happen to be one's own."

"Like those in the *Corsair* and the *Bride of Abydos*?" said Lacy, casting his eyes upon a volume of Byron which lay on the table.

"Yes; that sort of thing," she answered, very innocently, and with rather a hurried air, took up the book, as if in the hope that it would help her to arrange her thoughts. "Ay, it is all very beautiful," she continued, after she had turned over the leaves, abstractedly, for a few moments; "but that is not what I wanted to talk to you about."

"Whatever it may be, I am all attention," said Lacy.

"Are you? Ah! but now don't look so, and put on that sort of smile, as if you thought it was to be something amusing; indeed, I am going to be serious."

"And so am I; but you must give me time."

A short period of silence followed, which seemed to be employed by Miss Hartley in considering what she should say, as it was by Lacy in ruminating upon the singularity of her manner. She had, apparently, something to communicate, that she found a great difficulty in uttering, and she had been endeavouring to lead to it gradually and indirectly, and to gain courage by talking, till she could at length glide, without effort, into the midst of her agitating communication. This attempt had failed, and the Genius of Poetry, though so ably invoked, had refused to assist her. Apparently, however, she could find no aid in any other quarter, for, after a short consideration, she returned to her former topic.

“We were talking,” said she “about poetry, and you asked me what kind I preferred; and I told you I liked that which had most feeling in it. Now, I dare say, you wonder at my taste, but the reason why I like that kind is, because I think it teaches one to know one’s own sentiments, and—and to describe them—and—and that is so difficult!” As she said this, she blushed and uttered a very gentle sigh.

“Excuse me if I differ from you,” said Lacy, rather surprised at the course which the conversation was taking; “but I think that poetry of a highly-coloured and romantic class, indeed I may almost say, poetry in general, is rather likely to cause one to mistake the nature of one’s sentiments, than to improve the knowledge of them; and, as for describing them, I question whether the expressions of a poet, however natural, and just, and forcible, are ever such as one should use in speaking of one’s feelings to another, or even in writing to a friend.”

“Very true; I dare say you are right, and that is what makes it so difficult, for us especially;

there are so many things that women cannot say."

"Undoubtedly," replied Lacy, with increasing surprise; "there are many things which they cannot say—which they ought not to say."

"Ought not—ay, that is what perplexes one.—Do you think," she added, hesitatingly, and with greater agitation of manner, "that it can ever be proper and allowable for women to express themselves—I mean—I hardly know how to ask you—may they ever speak upon such a subject as their—their affections?"

She coloured and hung down her head as she uttered these words, and Lacy was scarcely less embarrassed.

"Strange!" thought he, "what can this tend to? Surely she will not make me a declaration of love!"

The import of her words, when he took into consideration all that he had been told of the state of her feelings, seemed to countenance this supposition; and Lacy, with all his curiosity, was by no means anxious for such an *éclaircissement*. "Really," said he, "I feel very incapable of answering you; I should be rather presumptuous if I made myself a judge of the niceties of female conduct. I am sure you are more able to solve these difficulties than I can be. My opinion would not be worth your having."

"Oh, I am sure your opinion is always very valuable to me."

"You do it too much honour to say so: it will always be at your service, when it can be of any avail. I am afraid," he added, forcing a smile, "in this instance, you would not find it of much use: I don't pique myself upon being a good casuist upon any point, especially upon one that does not rightfully belong to me."

Lacy then changed the topic, and prevented all chance of a recurrence to the former one, by speedily quitting her presence.

Lacy was perplexed and annoyed by the past interview; it removed the last veil of doubt which, thin, as it was, had still comforted him with some show of uncertainty with respect to Miss Hartley's unfortunate attachment. But now the fact was ascertained, and how was he to meet it? He could not requite her affections; he could not fly her presence; he could not bear to blight her passion by unkindness.

In this state of perplexity he was accosted by his mother, who was glorying in that same conviction, which was causing such torment to her unhappy son.

"Well, Herbert, where is Charlotte?" were Lady Lacy's first words.

"The eternal subject!" murmured Herbert, despondingly; "I don't know, Ma'am," he answered, drily.

"Don't know! Ah, Herbert, what would Charlotte have said, if I had asked her where you were?"

"I really cannot pretend to say," replied he rather irritably; "pray don't expect me to answer for Miss Hartley?"

"Well, I won't; but now don't look so angry, especially as you are talking about poor Charlotte. I am afraid you are unkind to her."

"Unkind! my dear mother, never! at least I am sure if I have, it has been quite unitentionally—I always wished to show her every possible civility."

"Ay, ay! but that won't do—it is past civility—you must show a great deal more now; indeed you must."

"Must!—ma'am, why?"

"Oh, I am confident you must. You know you cannot draw back—if people raise expectations, they ought to satisfy them."

"Undoubtedly, *if* they raise them—but I—"

"Oh yes, indeed you have raised them; at times you have been very attentive, and in public too, which made it more marked: you were so during the races—I don't remember whether or not at the Westcourt ball—you did not seem well at that Westcourt ball; but at the race ball, I noticed particularly, you were very attentive to her, and she looked so happy, poor thing!"

"I am very sorry, ma'am,—"

"Sorry! that she was happy?"

"Yes—if it arose from a delusion."

"Delusion, my dear Herbert! it is all delusion when people are in love."

"I believe it is, too often," said Herbert, whose thoughts returned to his own disappointment.

"Oh, yes; but now, Herbert, I cannot think it would be right in you to do every thing you can to gain the poor thing's affections, and then to turn your back upon her.

"Ma'am, I assure you, I have no such uncivil intentions; but I really don't know what is the every-thing that I have done to gain Miss Hartley's affections."

"Oh, Herbert, many things—I cannot describe them—but it was your manner, my dear, your manner. Others saw it as well as me, particularly at that ball: you know you danced with her twice, and you talked to her a great deal, and now you are always with her; and you have been wounded; and, what with one thing or another, I don't wonder that it turns out as it has: you know I always said I thought she liked you.

No more was said at the time, but Herbert thought long and anxiously on the subject.

“Fool that I have been!” said he to himself, in the bitterness of self-reproach, “to have been so blind to my own conduct; so little conscious of what I was doing. It seems then, that I have ensnared against my will, the affections of a person whose attachment I can never return, and I have done this so pointedly, that my conduct and its tendency were visible to many. I remember that fatal ball. I was galled by the coldness of one whom I ought to have avoided, instead of courting her attention, like a madman as I was. I ought to have profited by her noble example; but I was piqued and irritated, and tried to cover my chagrin under false gaiety and attention to others; and *then* I raised false expectations—yes, it is fit it should have been *then*. It was a moment of shameful folly and forgetfulness, and it has brought its just and bitter consequences. I have deceived Charlotte Hartley, and I must repair the wrong: my hand is all that I can give, and I will give it. I can never feel any love for her; but I will be very kind to her, and—I must forget Agnes, if I can.”

CHAPTER VIII.

Your virtues, gentle master,
Are sanctified and holy traitors to you.
As You Like It.

IN this state of mind, he sought the counsel of his sister, whom he wished to make the depository of his sorrows, and perhaps the medium of his intended sacrifice. He found her a willing confidant; indeed, she was secretly a joyful one; she found that the important moment had arrived, and that it only remained for her to strike the blow that was to crown her plans with success.

She listened to Herbert's communication with much appearance of affectionate interest.

"My dear brother," said she, when he had ended, "I sincerely regret the unfortunate course which circumstances have taken; nor do I entertain the slightest doubt that they are as we fear.— It is as certain that Charlotte is attached to you, as that you are not attached to her. I am afraid too, that it is equally certain, that you (though unintentionally) have encouraged that attachment; indeed you are conscious of it yourself: your own honourable feelings have already dictated the only ample reparation."

"Yes," said Lacy, mournfully, "I know the sacrifice that I ought to make, and I now wish to ask you to be the bearer of my proposals. I know it is a singular request; but I cannot play the suitor

myself: I should only distress her by my coldness, and betray the secret of my real indifference. Will you grant me this favour?"

His sister hesitated. "I would willingly do this, and more for you," said she; "but let us first be certain that it is necessary. Herbert, I may safely say to you that I like this match almost as little as you do yourself. I should wish to see you married, but not to Charlotte. I will say it, though she is my husband's sister. She is a good girl, and I dare say would prove an amiable and comfortable wife; but she is not such to *you*. There is too great a difference in your minds; they would have nothing in common—in fact I know you despise her."

"'Despise' is a harsh word."

"Yes, but no the less true. Let us be honest—it is no time, my dear brother, for me to be picking phrases when your happiness is at stake. Yours and Charlotte's would be an unequal marriage, and I am sure that all such marriages are more or less productive of unhappiness, whatever the inequality be—whether of age, rank, fortune, or mind. You could never make a companion of Charlotte, nor could she appreciate you as you deserve.—There would be little communion or confidence, and without confidence a married life must be one of misery."

"I see it, and feel it bitterly," said Herbert, in a tone of despair; "but pray spare me this prospect, unless you can do any thing to remedy the evil."

"I trust I can. I should not have spoken unless I had some hopes of assisting you. With every wish that you should do what is right, I cannot think that an immediate offer of marriage is necessary. Charlotte is certainly much attached to you; but she is of such a disposition that I think

she would be quite satisfied with a continuance of the brotherly and sisterly footing on which you now associate, if she could be assured that it was lasting, and that she should not be supplanted by any one else. She has a very reasonable diffidence in her power of fixing your affections, and a considerable jealousy of disposition; and I think if this was appeased by any declaration on your part—by an engagement, let us say—by a proposal of marriage at some distant, unspecified period—I, think there would then be some ground for hope that in time her attachment would be so far cooled, that you might withdraw yourself with perfect ease, and without any violence to her feelings.”

Herbert's countenance alternately brightened and clouded over at this proposal.

“If you tell me,” said he, “that such an engagement would be satisfactory to Miss Hartley, I am sure I can believe you, for I do not think you would speak without sufficient grounds; and I am sure that any such postponement will be a great relief to me: but I do not know how I can frame such a proposal. How can I seem at once anxious and reluctant—to wish the marriage, and not to wish it?”

“Leave that to me. You know you have asked me to bear your proposals, and I have undertaken the office. There are no difficulties of any moment.”

“But,” said Herbert, “I don't quite like the idea of making an engagement which is not to be fulfilled. It seems deceitful.”

“My dear Herbert, you deceive yourself. It is to be fulfilled—provisionally—it is to be fulfilled at some future time, in case that she should still continue to testify the same feelings. I cannot for an instant suppose that you have any intention of withdrawing from your contract, or that you

would scruple to fulfil it, if you saw that nothing less sufficed to satisfy her mind."

"You do me no more than justice," replied Herbert.

"Of that I am sure," said his sister. "But if you wish to put the proposal upon a different footing, I think I can arrange it, so as to spare you the pain of feeling that the marriage is deferred solely by yourself. I will say generally that you wish to consider yourself engaged to Charlotte until she may choose to dissolve the engagement. Yes, yes, it shall be so. I am sure *that* will be satisfactory. Nay, it will show even more consideration for her, by placing the liberty of retracting solely in her power. It will effectually relieve her from the dread of being supplanted by any one else, and that, to her timid mind, is the chief source of anxiety. The engagement will subsist for a while, till at last it is quietly dissolved, without surprise or sorrow to either of you. As for the delay of your marriage, there will be nothing in that to excite astonishment, or require explanation. Marriages are constantly deferred, without any but the parties concerned knowing why. Law and a thousand family arrangements may intervene to delay a marriage, and who knows the particulars or would even have the patience to hear them? No—the fact of an engagement is all that the gossiping public care about. The time is comparatively immaterial. But I must perform my mission while it is fresh in my mind. Farewell for the present: you shall soon hear the result of my negotiations."

That result he soon heard, and he was told that it was very satisfactory; that Miss Hartley had received the communication with all proper blushing confusion, and that though she had said little to the purpose, she had looked every thing that she

ought. To Lady Lacy, the result of this long cherished affair, proved not entirely agreeable; and it required a good deal of dexterous management on the part of Mrs. Hartley to prevent her from destroying that state of neutrality in which, through her ingenuity, the parties had been placed. Neither Sir William Lacy nor Charles Hartley contributed any visible influence. The former refused to give any attention to the subject, merely saying that Herbert might act precisely as he felt inclined. As for the latter, he was quite contented to adopt, without inquiry, any opinion his lady might express.

Mrs. Hartley reviewed the circumstances with all the complacency of a successful plotter. She had succeeded in fixing upon her brother and sister-in-law, a yoke which she trusted might keep them long unmarried. She could not feel any certainty of the long continuance of the present safeguard; but it was something gained; and let it only exist for a few years, and she trusted that such habits of celibacy would be formed as it would be no very difficult matter to perpetuate. Let them only remain single, and their fortunes, at their death, would centre in her children: at least she had every reason to hope that, with proper management, such might be the result. One of the two, she flattered herself, could hardly escape her toils. She was most anxious about her brother, for Charlotte's fortune was small in comparison with his expectations, and she felt that over him she possessed a very limited control.

Notwithstanding her pretences, she was by no means convinced that Charlotte was attached to Herbert, and she felt that she was grossly deceiving him in assuming that conviction. The cruelty of the imposition which she had practised, and the engagement into which she had led him, also struck

her with a momentary pang. But she tried to stifle these upbraidings of her conscience, by a false persuasion of duty. "If it is an injury to some," said she to herself, "it is for the benefit of others, that are still dearer to me. I do it for the good of my children. Surely their welfare should be the first object of a mother."

This was mere sophistry, and she knew it—yet it seemed to afford some satisfaction. To whom is sophistry not welcome in cases such as these? It is the universal panacea of guilt; and like an opiate, is greedily received as a soothing balm, by those who still know it to be poison.

CHAPTER IX.

A popular license is indeed the many-headed tyrant.
SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

THREE months now passed without the occurrence of any event that tended to produce a material alteration in the situation of the parties already mentioned. The engagements of Agnes to Sackville, and of Lacy to Miss Hartley, still continued in undiminished force. The only changes that did take place, were slow and progressive. Lacy gradually regained his strength, Sackville's visits became less frequent, Mr. Morton suspended his inquiries, and the intercourse between the families at Lacy and Dodswell, seemed likely to become as cold and slight as it had been before.

Mr. Morton's manner had received an unfortunate change. He was out of spirits, and was grave and more than usually irritable, and seemed to have been soured by adverse circumstances. Some traced these appearances to the duel; while others, with more truth, hinted at the possible derangement of his affairs. This latter opinion, however, was not justified by any alteration in his state of living, or the retrenchment of previous expenses. It was rather to be collected from the uneasiness and impatience which he occasionally manifested, when any word was dropped in his presence, that had a reference to expenditure or retrenchment, and the anxious look with which he seemed to in-

quire, whether any thing contained in the expression was levelled at him.

It was about four months after the duel, and early in the ensuing year, that the public were informed of the sudden death of one of the representatives of the borough of Wichcombe. Wichcombe was a close borough, the nomination to which was shared by Lord Rodborough, with a wealthy commoner. The gentleman who died, had been Lord Rodborough's nominee; and his sudden decease, which Lord Rodborough protested to be very inconvenient, reduced him to the immediate necessity of looking out for some other person to fill that situation. His two sons were already in parliament, and so were most of his relations; and, after much consideration, he could think of no person so apparently eligible to such a post as Mr. Morton. He could not hope that he would be quite so subservient as the late member, who, having no sort of political opinion himself, implicitly followed every hint of his patron: but Mr. Morton was the father-in-law of Lord Malvern, and a man well known to the world; and was a very natural, and respectable object of choice.

The proposal was made, and, as it was dexterously done, in a manner flattering to Mr. Morton's pride, he readily acceded to it. Perhaps it would be unfair to inquire whether he was actuated by the prospect of obtaining the personal security afforded by the privilege of parliament. The question of expenses was afterwards to be discussed; and it was treated by Mr. Morton with an affected carelessness, and an impatience, which did not escape the keen observation of Lord Rodborough's agent. He was probably induced to take advantage of it, for he proposed and obtained the singular conditions, that though the whole of the slight expenses of an uncontested election should be borne

by Lord Rodborough, yet that in the event of a contest, he should contribute only a half, and that the remainder should be borne by Mr. Morton.

However, as no contest was then in prospect, it seemed as if such an agreement might be made with perfect safety ; and Mr. Morton, having once consented to stand for the borough, did not like to retract upon a mere point of expense. Whether the truth was known to the agent of Lord Rodborough, is more than we can venture to say ; but certainly at that time, a contest was more than merely probable. The late member, though enjoying a reasonable share of personal popularity, had excited discontent, by his maintenance of principles which were at variance with those of the majority of his constituents ; and as his principles (if they might be so called) were known to be precisely those of Lord Rodborough, it was to be apprehended that the same were to be looked for in any fresh member of his appointment. Many of the burgesses had expressed considerable discontent at the state of thralldom in which they were held, and the present vacancy was thought a desirable opportunity for ascertaining their rights to the liberty of choosing for themselves.

The result of their deliberations, was a determination to seek immediately a champion for their cause ; and on the day following Mr. Morton's acceptance of the proposals of Lord Rodborough, a deputation was on its way to Lacy Park, for the object of inviting either Sir William or his son to undertake the representation of the Borough of Wichcombe, and holding out, at the same time, flattering prospects of easy success. The result of the negociations between Lord Rodborough and Mr. Morton, was not, at that time, made known, nor had the little *fronde* of non conforming burgesses, made any formal signification of

their measures previous to that very day. Sir William Lacy and his son, were, therefore, in complete ignorance of the part undertaken by Mr. Morton.

For himself, Sir William declined the offer of the burgesses, but expressed a wish that his son might be accepted in his stead; and Herbert, in accordance with the wishes both of his father and of the deputation, consented to undertake the charge. His sentiments coincided with those of his inviters, and he felt that he could, with honour and consistency, become their representative. With every proper feeling of humility, he was also conscious that he had sufficient talent to do justice to their confidence, and to obtain some credit to himself; and he possessed that energy of character, which rendered the prospect of honourable exertion rather agreeable, than unpleasing to him. In politics he was not a bigot or an enthusiast. He was neither an humble worshipper of power, nor a heated admirer of the principles of republicanism. He was liberal in the truest sense, for he was willing to find, in every system, some admixture of good; and, with all proper abhorrence of that which was faulty, he was, fortunately, exempt from that angry intolerance with which the profession of liberality is too often accompanied.

The printed addresses of Lacy and Mr. Morton came out on the same day. They contained little more than a brief expression of the hopes and intentions of the respective candidates, and scarcely entered into any exposition of their political sentiments. It soon, however, came to be understood that little diversity would exist between them, except on one question—that of Catholic Emancipation. Lacy was known to be favourable to it; Mr. Morton, as the nominee

of Lord Rodborough, was concluded to be adverse.

Much surprise, and some feeling of repugnance and regret, were testified by each of the candidates, on finding to whom they were to be opposed. They felt that they were unpleasantly situated; and that their present opposition coming so soon after their duel, and being their first public act that succeeded it, would seem to argue a degree of confirmed hostility, which they were, each of them, far from entertaining. It may easily be imagined, that Lacy was sensibly grieved at the prospect of further dissension with the father of Agnes; nor was Mr. Morton altogether without some compunctious visitings, on finding himself again the opponent of one whom he felt that he had injured.

But neither of them could now contract. Mr. Morton was pledged to Lord Rodborough, and Lacy to the Wichcombe burgesses; and, though he could perhaps have convinced them privately of the propriety of his wishes for retiring, he had no such plea as he could safely publish to the world, or which would not be exposed to malicious and discreditable interpretations. He wrote a short and amicable letter to Mr. Morton, declaring his entire freedom from all remains of hostile feeling; his ignorance of the fact of having him for an opponent, until he was pledged beyond possibility of receding; and his hope, that the situation in which they were now placed, would be attended with no unfavourable change of sentiment.

The answer from Mr. Morton was expressed in handsome terms, and was quite satisfactory to the feelings of Lacy; and here their communication ceased, each being sensible that they had a duty to fulfil towards their supporters, which forbade

them to excite in their minds the suspicion of a collusive intercourse, and of any disposition to secret coalition, and to a barter of the public duty which they had undertaken at the shrine of their own private friendship. The canvass was commenced, and as the number of electors was small, it was soon completed; and each candidate, strong in promises of support which seemed to ensure to each a majority, calmly awaited the opening of the contest.

At length, the day of nomination arrived. The show of hands was pronounced to be in favour of Mr. Morton, and Lacy immediately demanded a poll. The poll was opened, and the modern Saturnalia began.

An election is a spectacle calculated to inspire an Englishman at once with pride and shame. For the entertainment of feelings of shame and disgust, there is assuredly ample ground. The rancour, the prejudice, the corruption, the hypocrisy, the most open venality disgustingly coupled with an affectation of principle and public spirit, and the exercise of a legal right brought into immediate connection with an unblushing breach of the established law—these are among the many traits that justify such an unfavourable feeling. But there is also much wherein to exult, not only in contemplating the constitutional advantages and the dissemination of general confidence which must result from the exercise of such a right, but in considering that however great may be the disorders which accompany it, and seem almost to neutralize its benefits, those disorders can be safely permitted; that there is a vigorous elasticity in the organization of the system which enables it to regain its course unhurt; that the apparently disunited links of the great chain which extends in nice gradation from the beggar to the monarch, are re-

stored unbroken to their original connection; and that when the tumult has subsided, not a particle is found to have been dissolved of that finest fabric of human society that the world has ever seen.

The contest was attended with most of the circumstances by which contests are generally characterized. Processions, swelled by a rabble who had no other means of taking a part in the election than by increasing its riot, paraded the streets in rival parties, bearing colours and flags, and headed by discordant bands of tipsy musicians. "Lacy and Independence," was the rallying cry of one party; and "Morton and Constitution," "Church and King," and "No Popery," were the watch-words of the other; and by dint of these, and the united flow of all the tap-rooms in Wichcombe, they were animated into a spirit of contentious valour which called more than once for the interposition of the authorities of the place.

The danger of a broken head did not extend, as is sometimes the case, to the candidates themselves; but they could not, of course, escape the usual infliction of election squibs. Bibs, leading-strings, and horn-books were exhibited in derision of Lacy's youth; and "Old iron to sell!" was the annoying cry which frequently greeted the appearance of Mr. Morton. It had been the aim of each candidate, and particularly of Lacy, to avoid every symptom of personal hostility, and soften by a show of courtesy in public the menacing appearance of their respective positions. It therefore became to him a matter of no slight uneasiness, when he found that his supporters were but too ready to attribute to him all the coarse rancour which they were pleased to exhibit towards those of the opposite party, and that they indulged in broad public allusions to the circumstances of the duel. So interesting a fact, when once adverted to, was

not likely to be allowed to slumber. Some pugnacious spirits began to flatter themselves with a hope of the contest being graced with the *éclat* of another meeting. The genius of poetry presently lent its aid; and on the third morning of the poll, rival ballad-singers were chaunting in dogged rhyme their perverted accounts of the duel of the candidates.

Under these unpleasant circumstances did Lacy meet his opponent on the hustings on the third morning of the poll. He knew not in what respect Mr. Morton was affected by the expressions of the populace, but he thought there was something more than usually chafed and haughty in his manner. This, however, could make no alteration in the sentiments of Lacy, or in the line which he meant to pursue. He felt that he owed him no further explanation, but that whatever he might say respecting their mutual situation, should be addressed less to him than to the public. He felt that some correction of their erroneous opinions was desirable; and, accordingly after a few remarks upon the state of the poll, and some political topics which had been previously adverted to, he proceeded to address them as follows:—

“And now, gentlemen, allow me to turn for a few moments to circumstances of a private nature, circumstances which concern not only myself, but my honorable opponent also; and which I should therefore not feel justified in publicly mentioning if they had not already, and in a manner painful to my feelings, and doubtless to his, been obtruded upon your notice. I allude, gentlemen, to the hostility which at one time existed between Mr. Morton and myself. I have seen with pain that an impression is prevalent that it still exists; and I now address you in the hope of removing that impression, by distinctly assuring you that all such hostility

has ceased. It ceased from the moment of our meeting; in me it has never been renewed, and I have the pleasure of thinking that no returning spark of it has actuated any part of the subsequent conduct of my honourable opponent.

“I am unwilling, gentlemen, that any one here present should think so meanly of me as to suppose that feelings of private resentment can enter into the motives of my present course. When I first aspired to the honour of being your representative, it was in the perfect ignorance of who my opponent might be, or whether any would present himself. I undertook the charge in the conviction that you had a right to contend for an independent vehicle of your sentiments; and I feel that I should be disgracing that good cause, if I were to admit the unworthy influence of private pique.

“Mr. Morton hears me, but I address this avowal solely to you. That gentleman, I am well persuaded, stands in no need of such an explanation. My sentiments are already known to him, and it is in his power to corroborate my present statement. I am confident that our private feelings are and will be as strictly amicable as our public conduct will be that of honour; and in the assurance of this, and in the presence of you all, I here offer him my hand.”

Loud acclamations followed the close of this address. Mr. Morton took the proffered hand, and in a frank and cordial manner briefly expressed his entire approval and unqualified confirmation of Lacy's words. Mr. Morton then repaired from the hustings to a dinner, attended by most of the principal electors. He was in good spirits in spite of the unpromising results of the poll, cheered apparently by the manly and amicable declaration of his opponent, with whom the appearance of a returning state of hostility had begun to weigh heavy on his mind.

The sitting was long and jovial; all where of one party and of one mind; and as there was nobody present to contradict any of their assertions, they soon found themselves in a condition to talk their opponents out of every possible chance of success. Healths were drunk, and thanks returned, and a profusion of high-sounding truisms were the customary result.

In the midst of this joyous career, when the uproar of a "Three times three" had nearly subsided, and the glasses were still jingling on the table, a servant entered and put a small note into the hand of Mr. Morton. He opened it carelessly, but no sooner had he cast his eyes upon the contents than he turned pale, his lips quivered, his hand trembled, and he sat the picture of embarrassment and dismay. In another moment he had torn it, and thrown it into the fire, replied only with a glance of anger to the "No bad news, I hope, Sir?" of an honest burgess near him, whispered to the gentleman at his side a request that he would take his place, and then, after a scarcely articulate apology for leaving the company, he rose and hastily quitted the room. A dead silence followed his departure, and curiosity and consternation were painted in the countenances of all present. At length curiosity so far triumphed as to induce them to commission one of their number to make inquiries, and to see Mr. Morton, if possible. He returned with the information that Mr. Morton was writing, and would not be disturbed. They soon learnt that a messenger was despatched to Lord Rodborough, and shortly afterwards, that Mr. Morton himself was on his way to Dodswell.

CHAPTER X.

That which gilded o'er his imperfections
Is wasted and consumed, even like ice,
Which, by the vehemence of heat, dissolves
And glides to many rivers; so his wealth
That felt a prodigal hand, hot in expense,
Melted within his gripe, and from his coffers
Ran, like a violent stream, to other men's.

COOKE.—*Greens's Tu Quoque.*

WE shall now transfer our readers to Dodswell, and prepare them, by a recital of previous circumstances, for the arrival of Mr. Morton. The only persons then at Dodswell were Lady Louisa, Agnes, and her younger sister Marianne; Lord and Lady Malvern were visiting in another county, and Sackville, fifty miles off, at his own place.—Mr. Morton, since the opening of the poll, had been staying at Wichcombe, from whence he had transmitted to his family daily accounts of the progress of the election. Lady Louisa was as much interested as she could be with any thing beyond the imaginary vicissitudes of her own tardy convalescence, and could but little sympathize with the anxiety of Agnes, who paid an earnest attention to the contest, and saw, in the present opposition of her father and Lacy, continual grounds for apprehension.

It was in the afternoon of the day on which we have seen Mr. Morton so abruptly quit the com-

pany of his supporters, that Agnes was sitting alone at Dodswell, in a room, the projecting window of which, commanded a view of the shrubbery, and of a private door which led to it from the house. The short winter's day was drawing to a close, and as the shades began to darken, she looked out with a corresponding spirit of gloom at the cheerless prospect. In so doing, she observed three men of ordinary appearance, enveloped in great coats, and with riding whips in their hands, pass along the shrubbery walk, and after looking about them for a moment, enter at the private door. She was struck with the unusual unceremoniousness of their mode of entrance, but knowing that electors, in the time of a contest, are apt to dispense with ordinary rules, she immediately conceived them to be three of the independent burghesses, who were bent upon showing their attachment to liberty and their candidate, by making his house their own. Under this persuasion, and anxious to receive the latest accounts of the progress of the election, she rang, and desired to know what report the persons who had just arrived had brought from Wichcombe. It was long before the servant returned with an answer to this inquiry, and when he did come, it was evident by his mysterious looks and troubled manner, that he was not the bearer of agreeable tidings.

He said they were not from Wichcombe; he could not pretend to say exactly from whence they came; he could not be quite sure whether they wanted his master; he hoped not, but he supposed they would stay till he returned.

"This is very strange," thought Agnes, struck both by the words and manner of the speaker, and feeling her apprehensions rapidly increase. "Something unpleasant has happened," said she to the servant, "and you do not like to inform me of it."

Speak, boldly—I can bear to hear it. Who are these people?”

“Well, then, Ma’am, if I must speak—they are the bailiffs;” and then came out the whole truth—there was an execution in the house.

Agnes did not scream or faint, though the shock was one of the greatest she had experienced. She sat in pale, agitated silence, listening, to the information which the servant, after the removal of the first awful difficulty, was perfectly willing to give. It appeared that the writ was issued at the suit of a man, whose brother-in-law was a burgess of Wichcombe, and voted against Mr. Morton.

Informed of this, Agnes, without delay, despatched a messenger to her father, with that note which had summoned him so abruptly from the presence of his supporters. She then turned her attention to the distressing question of the course she should adopt with respect to her mother, and doubted whether she should immediately inform Lady Louisa of what had occurred, or conceal the fact till the arrival of Mr. Morton. A short consideration induced her to attempt the latter course. She dreaded the moment when the truth should be made known to her. She was aware that the shock would be more severe to Lady Louisa, than it had been to herself. She had long suspected the derangement of her father’s affairs, though it was a subject on which she had never dared to speak, even to the extent of hinting at the desirableness of economy. But Lady Louisa had no such suspicions, nor would it have been easy to inspire her with them, for though not of a cheerful temperament, she had that timidity of character which induced her ever to shut her eyes to alarming truths; and her passiveness was allied rather to indolence, than to that stoical composure that would fit her to bear the blow with firmness.

The kind and judicious plans of Agnes, with a view to spare her the pain of a hasty discovery, were unhappily frustrated. She had been prematurely informed, through the babbling imprudence of her favourite attendant; and Agnes on entering her room, had the pain of seeing her sink down in a fit under the shock of the first discovery. She soon recovered her senses, and long were the distressing and unavailing lamentations which Agnes was doomed to hear; and frequent were the demands for explanations which she was not yet enabled to give. Lady Louisa, who considered it proper on so serious an occasion, to be more than usually ill, and thought herself unequal, even to the exertion of lying on a sofa, had retired early to rest, when Agnes was led to prepare for the approaching interview with her father, who, she was told, had arrived, and desired to see her in his own sitting-room.

When she entered, Mr. Morton was sitting dejectedly at a table, his face concealed by the hand on which it rested. He gave a short side glance to ascertain who it was, and then, without uttering a word, or removing the hand that shaded his eyes he extended to her the other. She took it in silence, and returned its tremulous, feverish pressure. He drew her towards him, and she rested her head upon his shoulder. It was a moment of bitter emotion, and the first tears which she had shed since she heard of this new calamity, now fell from her cheeks. He perceived them, and acknowledged, by a short and impressive embrace, this mark of her condolence, and then motioned her to sit beside him. He again took her hand, but some moments elapsed before he spoke.

“I need not tell you what has happened,” were his first words, “you know all—you know that I am a beggar. I have suffered for years more than

I can describe, for the sake of maintaining appearances, and this is the end of all my labours! and at what a time has the blow fallen!—in the midst of this election! Agnes, you look as if you would fain ask me why I engaged in that election—and well may you ask me! It was the desperate plan of a ruined man to hoodwink the world; to bolster up his falling credit; to gain a fresh claim to consideration, when he felt he was losing all his former ones. It was because I could not assign the true reason for a refusal, and because I wished to deceive even myself with the *éclat* of a little false prosperity; but did I?—no, no, no—Heaven only knows what I suffered; but now I am embarked, and I must still go on, if I can get the assistance I want. I have written to Lord Rodborough—I am anxious for his answer.”

Agnes looked at him earnestly, as if she wished to speak, but was almost fearful of addressing him. “I am your daughter,” said she, “and I feel as if all I have ought to be yours. Under present circumstances, I can hardly wish the election to proceed; but if you feel that your honour requires it, and I can command any money—”

“Thanks, thanks, my dear child, but you cannot assist me. Even if I had the wish (which I have not) to squander your fortune on myself, I could not do it without the consent of your trustees, and that would be, and ought to be withheld. Besides they are at a distance, and immediate help is what I require.”

At this moment a letter was brought in—it was the answer from Lord Rodborough. Mr. Morton eagerly took it, and began to read it aloud to his daughter. It ran thus:

“My dear Sir,—I am much surprised and concerned at the contents of your note. Whatever my suspicions might have been, I had no idea that

you were so far involved as you now confess yourself to be, and I cannot help thinking myself rather ill-used in not having been made acquainted with the state of your circumstances, when you engaged to become my nominee for Wichcombe. I like openness on many accounts, and flatter myself that I am not altogether, unworthy being trusted. You are my candidate, and your defalcation will prove very inconvenient to me, as there is now no time to engage another. I am therefore inclined to make the best of a bad bargain, and must consequently desire ——.” Mr. Morton could read no longer, but tore in pieces the insulting letter and threw it into the fire.

“Insolent, selfish fool!” he exclaimed, with a countenance inflamed with indignation, “does he think me his slave? Gracious God! have I laboured for no better end than to be viewed in such a light as this? To what have I exposed myself! but I will not bear it another moment. No: Lord Rodborough’s humble tool will be no longer subservient to his lordship’s views—I give up the contest. Inconvenient to him! not one word of compassion for my misfortune! Pshaw! compassion! what am I thinking of? thank God he did not offer it! I am insulted enough without it.”

He then sat down, and wrote a short letter. It was to the returning officer of Wichcombe, stating that he declined the contest. He then commenced another, when Agnes, who feared that her presence might be irksome to him; rose, and was about to retire. He begged her to remain, and said that he was going to write very briefly to Lord Rodborough. This intimation was fortunate; Agnes looked at his irritated countenance, and approached him with an air of mild expostulation.

“My dear father,” said she, “do not think me

too bold, if I beg of you as a favour not to return an immediate answer to Lord Rodborough. You are angry with him, and very justly, but his rudeness may now appear to you deserving of a more severe notice than you may afterwards think it worthy of. He has no right to expect so immediate a reply—pray defer it till to-morrow.”

Mr. Morton smiled, and pushed the paper from him. “You are quite right,” said he: “I was on the point of saying what perhaps I could not have reflected on with as much pleasure as I can on this,” and he laid his hand on the note that contained his resignation. He covered his eyes for a few minutes, as if engaged in thought, and then looked up with a composed and almost cheerful countenance. “How wonderful,” said Mr. Morton, “are the changes of one’s feelings under the trials of misfortune, and how beneficial to us oftentimes are seeming evils! You do not know the load that is taken off my mind. You could not conceive it, unless you were aware of what I have suffered during many years past—I feel like a prisoner let out of jail—I am relieved at last from the terrible yoke of supporting false appearances. Oh, my dear daughter, if your poor father has seemed too often harsh and capricious, attribute much of his waywardness to this curse that hung over him. Perhaps I ought not to plead it as an excuse, because I brought it on myself; but I am confident that many of the defects of temper, of which I am conscious, have been aggravated by my circumstances. Of all poisons to one’s happiness, one of the most deadly, is a continual struggle to seem what one is not. Think what it must be to a person of honourable feelings, to be continually sensible that his whole conduct is a practical lie, and that he is endeavouring to affirm by deed, what he would scorn to utter in words—

what he could not utter without exposing himself to one of the worst insults that a man can receive—yet this I did, and still felt that I had an equal right to resist the slightest impeachment of my honour. What a mere paradox is human conduct, if one could sift it to the bottom, and see all its contradictory motives! Now, at last, I seem to understand myself. My real prosperity has long been gone I am glad the bubble is gone too—Adversity seems to have already taught me to see clearer—perhaps I may be happier for it—I certainly should if I could think that I had hitherto endangered no happiness but my own—but I know too well what I have sacrificed.” His voice faltered, and he seemed to make an unavailing effort to proceed. He took his daughter’s hand, pressed it to his breast, and added, in a low tone,—“I have sacrificed you.”

Agnes was startled and agitated by this sudden allusion to her own situation, and, for a while, was unable to answer. “Do not think so,” said she at length, “I shall always look upon Mr. Sackville as a very valuable protector; and even if I cannot feel any very strong affection for him, I ought not to repine at being in such hands as his—besides—” she suddenly checked herself, and presently added, “Yes, yes, I believe it is all for the best.” Her mind was recurring to Lacy. Mr. Morton understood her thoughts, and forebore all further remark.

In spite of his self-congratulation at escaping from the trammels of a false assumption of wealth, Mr. Morton soon gave way to melancholy, on viewing the features of his new situation. It was plain that his former character and station in the world could be maintained no longer, and that he must henceforward be content to give up, not only the parade in which he had so long delighted, but

the more praise-worthy enjoyment of the pleasures of an extensive society. Unfortunately, too, he had been but little accustomed to seek for social happiness in his own domestic circle. He could hardly be blamed for this, for the search promised little success. Lady Louisa was a dull companion; Lady Malvern had scarcely interested him more; and of Agnes, till within the last three years, he had never seen much. She was now his chief, and he might almost say, his only consolation; for his youngest daughter was still but a child, and his sons were absent.

On Agnes now devolved the difficult though grateful task of administering that consolation, of which her parents seemed so much in need. She had been a bright ornament in their days of prosperity; but it was now that her value was most deeply felt. The gloom of their situation would have seemed intolerable, but for the cheering influence of that mental sunshine, which, harassed as she was by other sorrows, superadded to theirs, she could always diffuse around her. She was not only a zealous, but a judicious comforter—she did not press unavailing topics of consolation—she did not provoke to an indulgence in repining by seeming to under-rate the extent of the misfortune—she acknowledged its magnitude, and at the same time showed that she could contemplate it without dejection—she never appeared solicitous to console, an appearance which must ever defeat the object; but contrived that consolation should seem to come unbidden, rather than to have been summoned by her ingenuity.

The first friend and adviser whom Mr. Morton called to his aid, was Sackville, to whom he wrote after his resignation of the contest, and begged for his immediate presence. Sackville was then at his

country seat, at the distance of about fifty miles from Dodswell, and on the second day after the receipt of the letter, having forwarded an excuse for his delay, he joined the disconsolate party. In the meantime, we may pause to review the machinations of this dangerous and deceitful person.

CHAPTER XI.

We must not make a scarecrow of the law,
Setting it up to scare the birds of prey,
And let it keep one shape, till custom make it
Their perch, and not their terror.

Measure for Measure.

MR. MORTON'S letter to Sackville caused neither surprise nor sorrow to the latter. The event of the execution was not unexpected nor unwelcome. On the contrary, it had been promoted by himself, under the agency of Allen, acting on the fears and impatience of Mr. Morton's other creditors; and the time at which it had been carried into effect had been expressly marked by his direction. He had secured to himself the hand of Agnes, by terrifying her weak father with the prospect of a discovery of his embarrassment; and, having gained this object, he no longer feared to realize the threatened evil. His motives for procuring the execution to be levied against Mr. Morton were chiefly economical; and their object was to check that course of expense, which was every day adding to the frightful magnitude of his embarrassments.

The fortune of Agnes he regarded as eventually his own; and, though he intended after their union to resist her wish of liberally administering to the necessities of her parents, he considered it desirable that those necessities should be previously contracted as much as possible, and that the accumu-

lation of debt should be checked. He also thought it better that the situation of Mr. Morton should be known to the world before his marriage with Agnes. There would be something apparently disinterested in marrying the daughter of a ruined man, even though that daughter were an independent heiress; and it would give to his mercenary match the amiable colouring of the purest affection. Besides, if assistance must be afforded, it would be both cheaper and more meritorious to relieve the humble wants of acknowledged poverty, than to minister to the private cravings of habitual extravagance.

It was therefore decided that the life of profusion which Mr. Morton had so long led, must have its immediate end, and that he should at length be taught retrenchment in the bitter school of undisguised adversity. This was one of his objects; the other was of a much darker character. It was not sufficient that the blow should be struck, unless it could be made instrumental to setting at variance the Mortons and Lacys, and blackening the character of the latter. His measures, with respect to Herbert Lacy, were no longer dictated by mere precaution. Jealousy and hate now urged him to pursue, unnecessarily, for their gratification, those plots which were first prescribed by the calculations of self-interest. He hated the man whom he had injured; hated him *because* he had injured him. He knew that Agnes had loved, and still, at least, respected and esteemed him; and this he could not brook. Had she been his at that moment he would not have deemed his triumph sufficient, unless he could have caused her to look with abhorrence on the object of her first attachment.

We will now conduct our readers to Mr. Sackville's seat at Trentford. The time will be a few

hours after the arrival of Mr. Morton's letter. The place, a room somewhat too spacious and elegant for the antiquated name of study, yet to which those of library or drawing-room would be equally inapplicable. It presented to the eye various insignia, alike of business and of literary leisure; and the spectator, like Hercules, pressed to make his choice, stood perplexed among the various inducements to exertion and to indolence. A solemn, business-like inkstand, of large dimensions, was opposed to the last luxurious contrivance for easy reading, a chair, ostensibly for study, but more truly calculated for sleep; tape-tied papers were relieved by a review; and a large blue report of the bullion committee, was surmounted (*proh pudor!*) by the last new novel. Newspapers, and a few of the minor fry of periodical works, filled up the intervals, together with numerous pamphlets "from the author," on the corn, catholic, and other questions.

Sackville was alone in this apartment. A book was in his hand, but his mind seemed to be otherwise engaged. His look was that of disappointment and impatience; and he muttered, from time to time, half audible expressions, as if taxing some person with delay. At length his anxiety was appeased by the entrance of a servant, who said that Mr. Allen desired to see him, and presently that person was introduced.

"It matters not," said sackville, when after the first greetings, Allen began to apologize for his delay; "it matters not; and now to business. First read this letter," and he put into his hands that which he had received from Mr. Morton. "So far, good. Your friend, the suing creditor, may congratulate himself on having given the victory to his own party; and you, Allen, may congratulate yourself on having done a substantial kindness to Mr. Morton."

Allen smiled, as if at the irony of the observation.

“I speak seriously,” replied Sackville; “I do consider it a kindness, and it was meant as such by me. It will open his eyes to his real situation. It would have been better for him if it had happened long ago, but I hope it will not come too late to save him.”

“I am sure, Sir, I hope so as much as you can do,” said Allen, with a demure, half suppressed smile, as if he fully penetrated the hypocrisy of Sackville’s expressions. Sackville gave him a short, inquiring look, and then proceeded.

“I said the execution was well timed. I do not know whether you understand me; if not, I must explain. You are aware that it has forced him to resign the contest, and has given the victory to the other party. Nothing could happen better for them; if they had devised the business themselves they could not have devised it more successfully.”

Allen assented.

“Well,” pursued Sackville, “now, I ask, may not Mr. Morton reasonably suppose that they actually did contrive it? Your friend, the suing creditor, is a voter on the Lacy side; he may have acted, not only for his own individual benefit, but for the advantage of his party; and Mr. Lacy might have known what was to happen, and have even advised and encouraged the measure.”

“He might, certainly,” replied Allen, doggedly; “but I know, for my own part, that he had nothing to do with it.”

“I know that too; but others need not know the same. In short, to come to the point at once, I wish that Mr. Morton should think that he was the instigator of all that has happened. I have paved the way to this belief in a manner which I will afterwards explain. The means of instilling it fur-

ther I shall then leave to you. I know, my friend, that you have a plausible tongue, and a good resolute face, and a very fertile inventioa. I shall not ask you to do any thing disgraceful,—to tell coarse, plump, flaring lies,—simply to insinuate. I want a proof of your address; but, ‘a word to the wise’—you understand me—let it be as I desire, and you shall find me not ungrateful.”

Allen looked grave and thoughtful.

“I understand you, Sir,” said he; “and I believe you know that I would do a great deal to serve you; but I must honestly tell you that I do not like this business. I should be very sorry to engage in it, and I must beg you will excuse me.”

“Impossible,” said Sackville, drily.

“I have no heart of it,” continued Allen. “I think it is much such another business as the last, and you know how that turned out.”

“That was an unfortunate affair, I acknowledge. The duel was quite unexpected, and might have had very serious consequences; though, as it happened no evil resulted from it, and the parties became better friends than before. But here I promise you that there shall be no fighting; not even a lawsuit, Allen, which is more in your style of hostility. The parties shall not exchange one angry word, and every thing shall be conducted with a due regard to your most peaceable intentions.”

“That may be, Sir—that may be; but I don’t see the object, and I don’t like the principle. Here is a young gentleman to be taxed unjustly, and made to appear in a shameful light; and here is Mr. Morton made to bear all sorts of ill will towards a person that does not deserve it. I cannot think that this is right, Sir, and I don’t like to have a hand in it.”

“Indeed!” said Sackville, with a scornful smile.

“You are grown mightily conscientious! Allen, I

must tell you plainly that I think you might have had somewhat more confidence in me. You need not have supposed so readily that my motives must be wrong, merely because you could not understand them. You say you can not see the object—nor do I intend you to see it. You force me to speak plainly—you are my instrument, Sir, and not my fellow counsellor. You do not see the great and useful end I have in view, and you are starting at what you consider the equivocal nature of the means. Perhaps you don't know that in questions of morality, the means are totally disregarded; the end is the only thing considered. Nobody can be said to have acted either ill or well till the whole of his conduct can be viewed together. If you want an apology for evil means, only look at the scheme of Providence. Nature works by them as well as by that which is good—and surely always for a happy end. Why are lightnings and earthquakes permitted? Why do vipers encumber the earth? Why are murderers and robbers, aye, and forgers left unpunished? I tell you they have all their use. Let me have no more scruples. It may be some poor satisfaction to you to express them; but they can have no effect upon me, because I know that they are needless. I say these things, not to exculpate myself, but to satisfy you. It was unnecessary for me to have explained my sentiments so fully; but I wished to act a friendly part, and I expect that you will show your sense of it."

"Mr. Sackville," replied Allen in a submissive tone, "I beg your pardon, if I seemed to accuse you of meaning to do what was wrong. I am sure I have as much confidence in you as I should have in any gentleman that was to make the same proposal to me. I am a plain, simple man, Sir, and what little learning I have, has been picked up

here and there, as I best could. I am sure I won't pretend to argue with you about the morality of the case: I leave all that to you, Sir. I dare say it is quite correct, since you say it is. But I hope you will consider, that whether it may be right or not in the end, it will be a very dangerous business for me."

"Dangerous!" exclaimed Sackville, with a laugh. "Oh, then, it is fear, and not morality, that makes you so scrupulous on this occasion."

"You may laugh, Sir, and call it fear," said Allen; "but I cannot see that there is any shame in being mindful of consequences."

"No: nor do I wish you to be unmindful of them; but be pleased to recollect the consequences of disobeying me."

A silence ensued. Sackville turned away, leaving his hint to operate; and Allen, with a dark and troubled countenance, was reflecting on the most advisable answer to such a denunciation.

"I do not wish to disobey you, Sir," said he, "and I will give you a proof of it. Here, Sir, at this moment, I am ready to promise to do what you ask, upon condition that you will first grant me one little favour."

"I cannot listen to conditions; I asked for compliance, without reserve."

"Nay, but the favour is so trifling."

"Well, then, name it."

"Then, Sir, I ask you to let me first see—*that paper*."

Sackville regarded him with surprise and suspicion.

"You have made a strange request," said he; "what profit or pleasure can you find in looking at your own forgery?"

Allen returned no answer.

"This is mere trifling, Allen. If you have a

sufficient reason, tell it; but don't suppose that I can go out of my way to gratify an idle whim."

"I am sorry to hear it, Sir, because, in this case, neither can I go out of my way to do as you desired me."

"Good God! but consider the consequences."

"Yes, Sir, I do consider the consequences, and I shall leave them to follow as they may. I am very sorry to seem to thwart you, but I really cannot comply unless you grant me this favour."

"I understand it," thought Sackville. "The rascal has taken it into his head that I have not the power I assume; that the paper is defective, or not in my possession. Perhaps it is better to deceive him. A refusal would only confirm his suspicions—Allen," said he, sternly, "I cannot commend the reasonableness of your request; but nevertheless, it shall be granted:" and so saying, he quitted the room, leaving Allen alone to all the gloomy retrospect of guilt, and the fearful hopes which he had then before him. His motives were partly such as Sackville had conjectured; but in addition to these, he had also proposed to himself the bold measure of forcibly seizing and destroying the forged paper. In a set struggle with Sackville, who was a strong and well-made man, he could have little chance of succeeding; and he could therefore depend only upon craft, and the unexpectedness and rapidity of his movements. While he was arranging his plan of attack, and nerving his courage for the encounter, Sackville re-entered the room.

The first thing he did was to lock the door.—Allen's anxious eyes were instantly turned towards him in expectation of the paper; but he saw no such object in Sackville's hand; he saw only the startling spectacle of a pistol, a powder-horn, and a bullet. Sackville neither spoke nor looked at him, but walked to the other end of the room, and

deliberately began to load his pistol. Allen's heart sunk within him.

"Mr. Sackville! the paper?" said he, inquiringly.

Sackville neither looked up, nor answered him a word.

"Mr. Sackville—I trust—I don't understand—I hope you will oblige me."

Still no answer.

"Mr. Sackville, for God's sake—pray explain!" said Allen, advancing.

"Stand back," interrupted Sackville, sternly.

"I am not alarmed, Sir," continued Allen; "I am still prepared to ask the same; it will do you little credit, Sir, to attack a defenceless man. Pray consider——"

"Peace! peace!" cried Sackville, with a look of scorn. "Do you think, if I wished to shorten your miserable life, it would not be the easier way to let the gallows do its office! I shall not take the trouble to hurt you;" and then having loaded his pistol, he rose and went to a large bureau which occupied a recess in the room. This he opened, and drew forth the ominous paper which contained Allen's forgery. He then turned towards that person, and approached him, holding in one hand the paper, and in the other, the loaded pistol.

"Allen," said he, with a milder air, "you must excuse my precautions. Documents like this, which hold the power of life and death, are not to be shown lightly, especially to those who are interested in destroying them. I will not suppose that you thought so meanly of my discretion, as to imagine that I should put this into your hand as I would a newspaper. No—first look here;" and so saying, he presented the pistol, levelled it at Allen's breast, and cocked it. Allen started, and shrunk backward, in alarm. "Compose your-

self," continued Sackville, coolly, "and listen to what I am going to say. You are aware that with one slight motion of this forefinger, I could put an end to your existence; yes—I see you are aware of it—good—and now I am going to gratify you. Here is the paper you wished to see. You shall not only see it, Sir, but you shall hold it in your own hands. You may read, scrutinize, spell every syllable, count the letters if you choose; but if you make the slightest attempt to destroy it—move but one finger with such an intention, and that minute will be your last. There, receive your forgery."

So saying, he placed in Allen's hand the paper on which hung his life. A death-like silence ensued. Allen stood motionless, holding before his eyes the fatal document, with the muzzle of Sackville's pistol about a yard from his breast. The situation of Allen was inconceivably tremendous, and thoughts of the most terrible nature were conflicting in his mind, while his eyes were wandering over the writing, of which he distinguished not a line. Even at that moment, and in spite of Sackville's awful threat, he was meditating the destruction of the paper; and once he looked up to try if he could discern any symptoms of mercy or irresolution in the aspect of his opponent; but he was met by a glance of deadly determination from Sackville's eye, which indicated at once that he had not threatened one tittle that he would not execute.

Allen's countenance fell; his resolution seemed to be blasted by that glance, and he felt his flesh creep with terror. All the awfulness of his situation burst at once upon him. He held in his hand one instrument for his own destruction, and another was before him. The deadly paper, and the deadly pistol—death by the law, and by the hand

of Sackville—were present to his mind at once, and he seemed like a wretched captive, so environed by forms of death, that he could in no way fly from its influence. This impression, and the terrible risk he was meditating, were too powerful for his resolution. Cold drops started from the forehead of the miserable delinquent; his lips quivered; his eyes looked glazed and wandering; his whole frame seemed to totter; and, with a trembling hand, he restored the paper to Sackville. The latter received it in silence, and surveying, with a look of contemptuous compassion, the pale and trembling figure of the unfortunate Allen, he poured out a glass of water and offered it to him to drink.

“Take this,” said he; “you have need of it: you have exposed yourself to an unnecessary trial; but you little thought it would be so severe. You will be wiser for the future. And now,” pursued Sackville, after a short pause, “I conclude that you will not refuse to do what I require.”

“I submit,” replied the other.

“Then you have nothing to fear; and if you second my views effectually, you shall have much to expect.”

Here ended the conversation, and the worthy confederates separated.

CHAPTER XII.

Let us prove that our minds are no slaves to fortune; and in adversity triumph over adversity.

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

THE sudden discovery and great extent of Mr. Morton's embarrassment, caused considerable surprise among his neighbours. In this land of commerce, public opinion is rather disposed to magnify the profits of successful speculation; and, accordingly, the father of Mr. Morton was generally believed to have left him a much greater fortune than was really the case. Mr. Morton was conscious, from the first moment of possessing it, that he was considered a richer man than he was, and this delusion of the public he had ever since been most fatally eager to strengthen. Regarding it, justly, as one of his most potent claims to respect, he had spared no pains to preserve, unimpeached, his character for opulence; and it is, therefore, not surprising that the world, which had hailed his opening career with a delusion, should have been still further blinded by his efforts to confirm it.—That he had debts was known to many; but this was supposed to proceed less from want, than from that carelessness which he always affected with respect to money, and few doubted his ability to pay them.

But, great as might be the surprise which his neighbours really felt at his unexpected ruin, they

soon ceased to express any. Most of them were soon prepared with their budget of previous suspicions, and sure indications, and startling circumstances, which they would have mentioned long ago, if charity had not forbidden. Society abounds with these "prophets of the past," who try to indemnify themselves for real short-sightedness, by pretending that the discovery of their foresight was controlled only by their discretion or benevolence.

Lord Rodborough, contrary to his usual custom, laid no claim to such foreknowledge. He thought it was better to be perfectly innocent of all previous acquaintance with the state of Mr. Morton's affairs; and that it would accord most becomingly with his dignified carelessness, not to have stooped to the consideration of so trivial a subject. He also chose to consider himself ill-used, by having been kept in the dark about it, which could not have been the case if he had entertained any previous suspicions. This appears to have been his first feeling, upon receiving the intelligence which Mr. Morton had despatched to him, after retiring from the company of his supporters at Wichcombe.

"If the fellow was distressed," said his lordship, adjusting his cravat as he spoke,—“Why the devil did not he tell me so? I like openness especially in these money matters; it saves a deal of inconvenience;” and under this dignified view of the subject, he despatched the answer which gave such violent, and, we may add, such just offence to Mr. Morton.

That unfortunate person was utterly depressed by this calamity. He felt degraded in the eye of the world, shrunk with horror from the idea of society, and could scarcely bear to meet the face of a familiar friend. He viewed himself, de-

spondingly, and with some truth, in the light of a detected impostor. He knew that he had long deceived the world with a false show of affluence, and he feared that it would be found not backward in taking vengeance for the fraud. It is true that he was released from the burthen of supporting false appearances, and he tried, in his misery, to account it a relief. But those appearances, irksome as they might prove, had been among the main objects of his life. A bitter sense of the degradation which must ensue to himself and his family formed the most poignant part of his afflictions. As for the deprivation of former luxuries, he viewed it, at first, with comparative disregard; such sacrifices seem ever trifling in the aggregate, and it is only when viewed and attempted separately, that their greatness becomes known. Besides, to one who was writhing, like Mr. Morton, under the infliction of imaginary contempt, it was even a consolation to be able, by personal privations, to lay some claim to the dignity of suffering.

He had indeed, much to bear, and it was useless to disguise how much. His establishment must be broken up, his goods sold, and he must fly from Dodswell. He felt little difficulty in breaking these circumstances to Agnes, for he saw in her a strength of mind which would enable her to receive them calmly. She even anticipated the terrible necessity, and anticipated it almost with cheerfulness. But it was difficult to disclose the real extent of their misfortune to Lady Louisa, in such a way as to mitigate its severity. When she heard that all they had must be sold, even her very jewels, she persisted for some time, in discrediting the possibility of such an outrage.

But the methodical diligence of the sheriff's officers soon convinced her of the unhappy truth.

They had immediately proceeded to take an inventory of all the moveable property that the house contained; and Lady Louisa found herself obliged to resign her jewels, and see them included in the list. Many and earnest were her entreaties for the exemption of her paraphernalia; and she vainly thought to shock and intimidate the myrmidons of the law, by informing them that they were laying their unhallowed hands on jewels that had been worn by a Duchess of Swansea. But she found that the dignity of the former possessor, was totally inapplicable to the present case and was thrown into the last agony of despair, by being told civilly, but with an air of decision that admitted of no resistance, that any such exemption was impossible.

The under-sheriff appeared at Dodswell, and seemed desirous of softening, as far as was possible, the rigours of the law. Such simple moveables as were absolutely necessary, were allowed to be retained, and their fears were quieted, of being obliged to seek a new abode in a state of utter destitution. They had no complaints to make of harshness and brutality, on the part of those whose duty it was to execute the legal mandate. They received, from these authorized intruders, all the deference and civility which circumstances admitted, and it was evident that a wish was entertained to spare their feelings as much as possible.

But there are states of the mind in which this exemption from the very worst that can befall, is hardly received as a relief. Suffering seems robbed of that dignity, the sense of which supports us under it, when we find that far from our having endured, its extremities, it has, notwithstanding its severity, still been alleviated. This unavailing mercy, which strives to lighten the evil without being able to remove it, seems but a contemptuous

tribute to our weakness. It unnerves our fortitude; and while it takes a little from the heap of our misfortunes, makes us more keenly sensible of all that remains.

These may not be the feelings most proper for the unfortunate, but they are very natural ones, especially in minds which have ever listened to the dictates of pride. They occurred in galling bitterness to Mr. Morton, and he never more strongly felt his degradation than when he found himself an object of compassion to a sheriff's officer.

On the second day after the despatch of the letter to Sackville, that gentleman arrived at Dodswell. His presence was received by all as a welcome succour. Even Agnes was glad of his arrival; for though she had misgivings of the real goodness of his disposition, she could fully appreciate his companionable qualities, and had great reliance in his clear worldly sense and address in matters of business, and doubted not that he would recommend such courses as were most advisable in their present situation. She had also another still more urgent reason for wishing to see him. He was one of the trustees in whose hands her own large fortune was placed, and she wished for his advice and permission in rendering that fortune available for the relief of her parents.

Hers was a cruel situation. Mistress of wealth, she was not only threatened with the evils of poverty, but compelled to see her parents exposed to it without being able to offer more than vague hopes of future assistance. Her mother evidently relied upon her for help, and somewhat too regardless of the sacrifice she was exacting, had almost expressed her opinion that the fortune of Agnes would save them from the necessity of quitting Dodswell. To these broad hints and distressing appeals, Agnes scarcely knew how to reply; and she feared lest

her mother, who was inaccessible to all explanation upon subjects of business, would attribute her reserve to the want rather of will than of power.

Agnes took an early opportunity of consulting with Sackville upon these important points, and earnestly entreated him to give his consent to the application of a large part of her fortune to the liquidation of her father's debts. Sackville seemed moved and interested by her appeal, assured her of his most entire sympathy, and promised to co-operate with her to the utmost of his power. He then began to point out the difficulties that lay in the way of his compliance. He reminded her that his single voice was insufficient for the adoption of any measure without the consent of Mr. Hawskworth, the other trustee; and he assured her, that to the best of his belief that consent would not be obtained but with the utmost difficulty. He described to her the inflexible pertinacity of his colleague, the jealous vigilance with which he watched over the accumulation of her fortune, and the probable earnestness with which he would resist any attempt to diminish it.

"But improbable as it may be," said Sackville, "we will suppose that his consent is gained: what will be the result? Very different from what you anticipate. You feel an amiable and generous wish to relieve your parents, and to restore them to their former situation, and you think that this may be done; but it is my duty to undeceive you, and to tell you that it is not possible. You may discharge some of the debts, it is true, out of your income: but you cannot enable your father to live here, as he has done. It is absolutely necessary that there should be a great and immediate retrenchment, and I need hardly tell you that this would be carried into effect much more completely by quitting Dodswell, than by remaining here.

I think too, you will acknowledge, that such a course would be less painful to your father's feelings. To live here still with straightened means while every thing around reminded him of former splendours, and of luxuries, and even comforts, which he must now deny himself, would be infinitely more galling than a much greater change of life elsewhere. It would be a subject of perpetual vexation; and I am confident, that it is wiser to suffer the shock of parting, than to endure, day by day, the lingering mortification which he would otherwise be exposed to."

Agnes concurred with him in the propriety of quitting Dodswell, but still urged her entreaty to be allowed to contribute to the liquidation of the debts. She alluded to their own engagement, and to the prospect of her fortune becoming eventually his; and appealed pointedly to his generosity, and remarked somewhat warmly on the imputations to which he might be exposed of thwarting her liberal views, because they might interfere with his future interests. She was animated by the strong desire of assisting her parents, and spoke with an energy and decision, for which Sackville was unprepared, and which at first startled and perplexed him. Nevertheless, he heard her with calmness and patience, and answered without hesitation.

"You have allowed yourself," said he, "to express a little doubt of the disinterestedness of my motives, but I know that it is an impression which you will not long maintain. It cannot affect me, and I will let it pass. You wish me to urge Mr. Hawskworth to join with me in satisfying the demands of your father's creditors out of your fortune. Do you know whom I should have to pay? Myself. Yes, I see you are surprised: but it is very true. I am one of your father's

principal creditors. I am not one of those who now sue him, nor will I partake of the spoil. I once hoped to have prevented what has now happened; I became his creditor to save him from the rapacity of others—bought up several of his debts, and in so doing, became indebted myself. But for me what has now burst upon your father would have happened long ago. I will not say, that in the end it might not have been better for him, if his distresses had been made apparent sooner, but still I have a satisfaction in thinking that I postponed the evil day, and ensured to you all a few more years of happiness. This is what I have done, and yet I live to hear my disinterestedness questioned, and by you, because I will not urge a measure, by which I myself should be an immediate gainer. Oh, Agnes, this is indeed a cruel return; but you were not conscious of the whole truth, and if you had been so, I could excuse much at such a time.”

Agnes expressed her sorrow for the injustice she had done him. Sackville declared himself satisfied, and proceeded.

“There is another view of the subject, in which I have not yet presented it to you. Suppose your whole fortune at your absolute disposal, and let us consider what, under present circumstances, would be the most judicious mode of proceeding. You should think not only of the present distresses of your parents, but of the future prospects of your brothers and sister. It is true, they have each a small independent fortune, but if this is all they are to look to, they will be ill provided for in after life. You should therefore so act as to benefit all, and this I assure you can never be done by opening the flood-gates of a lavish generosity. Economy and retrenchment are absolutely essential for the welfare of all, and you would be doing only an

unkindness, by rendering it less strongly felt. Your father—I may safely say it, for you know my respect for his many good qualities—your father is very deficient in prudence. His present situation shows it; and I fear there would be little prospect of amendment, as long as he had the means of supporting his former extravagance. Your means are ample, but you must not think them inexhaustible. They would soon fail, and then what would be the fate of all! Be reconciled to what has occurred. This blow may prove a salutary warning. Good often springs out of evil.”

A slight gleam of satisfaction passed across the countenance of Agnes: she could not reply to the arguments of Sackville, but her desire of relieving her parents out of her own superfluity still could not be repressed. He watched her looks, and traced the workings of her mind.

“I see,” he added, “that you are not yet satisfied. Well, then, I must have recourse to an argument, which I little thought to have required: you may wonder why I did not make use of it at first, but I wished to convince your reason, and I did not like to hurt you unnecessarily, by alluding to the excellent friend that we have lost—I mean your aunt. You may think her decision somewhat harsh, and that, were she now living, she might be induced to act differently; but this is beyond our knowledge. I can only tell you how she did decide, and I know you will feel that with respect to the fortune which she left you, her will should be law.”

Agnes expressed an earnest assent: Sackville paused for a moment, and then went on.

Our excellent relation was strongly impressed with the idea of your father’s extravagance. She seems to have foreseen that he would become embarrassed; and it was her wish that this misfortune

might be caused to fall as lightly as possible on his children. A short time before her death, she spoke to me upon this subject. Her will was then made. I was acquainted with its contents. She spoke, and with deep satisfaction, of the fortune which she had been enabled to leave to you. She then expressed fears of her brother's improvidence, and begged that I would not permit any money to be raised upon the security of your fortune, to be applied to the payment of his debts. I of course promised compliance, for I had no right to oppose her will: but—I don't know how it happened—I think of it now as a fortunate accident; I seem to have anticipated the entreaty that I am now exposed to—I told her, that such a refusal on my part, might hereafter seem harsh and invidious, and I begged that I might be provided with authority for my refusal by the expression of her wish in writing. She gave it me. I have it still; and since it must be so, I will now show it."

He left the room, and soon returned with the paper, which he put into the hand of Agnes. She recognised her aunt's hand-writing, and silently regarded it with emotion and respect. She turned away her face to conceal her tears—then restored the paper to Sackville, and said in a low and broken voice, "I am satisfied," and the painful subject was then dismissed.

CHAPTER XIII.

Every wish which leads us to expect happiness somewhere else than where we are, only lays a foundation for uneasiness.

GOLDSMITH.

It was decided that the family should quit Dods-well as soon as possible, and the only question that remained was, where they should go. Retirement was considered a primary object, and various secluded parts of England and the Continent were proposed and rejected in turn. Sackville, who wished to retain them as much as possible within his grasp, and under his eye, until his marriage with Agnes, offered them his own house at Trentford: but, Mr. Morton, whose pride shrunk from the acceptance of such an extent of obligation, refused this offer, as well as a similar one, that had been made by Lord and Lady Malvern. Sackville then recommended London or its vicinity, and brought forward many plausible arguments in its favour. The health of Lady Louisa, he was very sure, required that she should be in the neighbourhood of good medical advice, an opinion in which she strongly concurred: London, he said, and with some truth, was the best place for solitude, and retirement—no where could seclusion be practised more effectually—let them only live out of the way, and show themselves never, or but seldom, in the world, and they might enjoy as complete a seclusion as if two hundred miles divi-

ded them from the capital. Then he described so well the meddling, prying curiosity of remote neighbourhoods, and the difficulty of escaping from vulgar intrusion where every one, however insignificant, became an object of attention, that Mr. Morton was soon brought to think that no where could he be so effectually concealed from notice as in the metropolis itself.

Thither it was finally determined that the whole family should soon proceed, and Sackville offered to go before them, with the view of obtaining some quiet and humble residence. The yearly allowance of Agnes, and a small income constituting Lady Louisa's pin-money, were the only funds upon which they could now depend: their large household were all, with the exception of three old servants, obliged to be dismissed; many of them quitted the house long before the departure of the family, and its gloomy air of desertion, which every day became more apparent, added greatly to the misery of its unhappy inmates.

From the moment that the sheriff's officers had entered the house, the hand of care and attention seemed to have been suspended; and the whole *menage* began to assume a character of confusion and discomfort. The outward signs of those little indefinable elegancies which characterize a well-ordered English country residence, had rapidly begun to vanish; and before the Mortons had quitted it, Dodswell almost wore the appearance of being deserted. Within the dwelling there was little to relieve its silent gloom, except the melancholy preparations for the departure of the family, and for the approaching sale of the effects; pictures were removed from their places to be marked and registered, and rooms that had often been the scenes of social gaiety, were now converted into comfortless repositories of the collected spoil.

Their are few who can withstand the influence of local attachments. Our country, our dwelling, and, above all, the place of our birth, are frequently clung to with an ardour which, though we cannot coolly justify its reasonableness, we find it no less difficult to subdue. We almost act as if we fancied that the inanimate objects from which we part so mournfully, were for a while endued with consciousness, and could participate in our regrets. They recal to our minds past scenes, and former friends; and we view them as relics that are hallowed to our feelings by the associations which they convey. Many an object intrinsically trifling acquires a value beyond estimation, by circumstances of this nature. Wide, indeed, is the range of cherished recollections that cling around an ancient dwelling, and cruel is the blow that violates such a sanctuary.

At length the day arrived when the Mortons were to quit Dodswell. Distress had never seemed to press so heavy upon them as at that moment: to leave a home even under prosperous circumstances, and with a prospect of return, is melancholy; and they had neither present happiness nor cheering prospects. It was early on a gloomy morning in February, that the family set out upon their journey. The weather was stormy, and the sighing of the wind, and beating of the rain against their desolate mansion, added not a little to the depressing sights and sounds that encompassed them; and large patches of unmelted snow, served only to increase, by their contrast, the wintry blackness of the remainder of the landscape.

Two old servants accompanied the family, who, together with one that had been sent forward to prepare that humble dwelling that awaited them in London, now formed the whole of their reduced establishment; and with heavy hearts the party

drove from their own doors. Lady Lousia, and Agnes, and her younger sister, could not refrain from tears of bitter regret. Mr. Morton's strength had seemed almost to fail him as he entered the carriage, and he remained long sunk in silent dejection. They received a few marks of respectful condolence from their humble neighbours; but these demonstrations were rare. The Mortons, unhappily, had not conciliated the good-will of their inferiors, so successfully as that of their superiors and equals. Mr. Morton's manners were naturally haughty; and the people could ill-brook an air of aristocratic pride in one whose ancestors, within the memory of men still living, had mingled in the rank of the lowest classes. His extravagance, and frequent want of money, had also rendered him far other than a liberal landlord. Lady Louisa wished well to all, and did no harm to any; but she had never given herself the trouble of doing good.

The spirits of the party gradually improved as they receded from their own neighbourhood, and from scenes which they had so often viewed under happier circumstances. Desirous of change, they looked forward with a sort of melancholy satisfaction, even to their arrival in London, and were glad to trace the first visible effects of its far extended influence.

Of all cities in the world, London, perhaps, extends most widely its influence on the character of the surrounding country, and announces itself to the traveller at the greatest distance. Neither Paris, Naples, nor Vienna, the three cities of Christendom which approach it most nearly in size, can offer any comparison in this respect. They seem to have contributed little to the territory around them, and to have received little in return: the limits between town and country are clearly

defined, and the intercourse between them is comparatively slight: few indications of increasing activity, population, and wealth, meet the observation of the approaching stranger; and if his eye does not rest upon the roofs and pinnacles of the city, he will be scarcely conscious of its vicinity, till he is stopped by the soldier who demands his passport.

But who that approaches London can fail to note the far extended indications of its mighty presence? Even in this favoured land in which the general diffusion of civilization and wealth are the happiest and most distinguishing characteristics, even here the change is very evident as we approach the capital. The roads are better, and more thronged; the fields more carefully tilled; villas rise around in quicker succession, and the towns have an increasing air of gaiety, activity, and wealth; greater continually becomes the number, and more eager the haste of those who hurry to and fro, as if not the mere business of everyday life, but some great event of general interest was setting all society in motion; houses thicken on either side, at first separate, and far dispersed, then clustering into connected rows—now admitting glimpses of the fields behind them, then at length backed by other buildings, and enclosing you in every direction; till by degrees, country is found to be lost in town; you are at length beneath the influence of that smoky veil which many hours ago was seen hanging over the distant horizon; and the increasing turmoil, and bewildering movement of a teeming population, soon impel you to the full conviction that you are penetrating the recesses of the modern Babylon.

Few can enter this colossal city without feeling for awhile an oppressive sense of their own comparative insignificance. The most distinguished personages seem shorn of some portion of their

consequence, and every one perceives that even to their immediate friends they become the objects of a less powerful and engrossing interest as soon as they mingle in the maze of London.

This feeling, which is often unpleasantly humiliating, was now soothing and consolatory to the wounded spirits of Mr. Morton. He found in his desolate abandonment by a strange and careless crowd, the truth of that seclusion which Sackville had promised; and though it was more oppressive than the rural retirement of a remote district, he was comforted in judging it to be more effectual.

The house which Sackville had selected for him was situated in a quarter which, in the flippancy of his more prosperous days, he would have called the Polar regions. It was one of the Alpha Cottages, separated widely from the *soi-disant* habitable part of the west-end by that *impassable* barrier, the New-road. It was a small, melancholy, square building, imbedded in a damp, weedy garden. It retired many yards from the public way, an anomalous mixture of street and road, to which one knows not which name to assign, and commanded no more cheering view than wooden palisades, deformed with bills and chalkings; a gloomy row of high poplars, and, behind these, the comfortless shell of an unfinished range of buildings.

The party entered their humble dwelling with strong feelings of mortification and disgust; and the sight of the comparative wretchedness to which they had so suddenly sunk, caused many tears to Lady Lousia. Agnes tried to make the best of the dreariness of their situation; for she felt that now the time was come when they must feel the stern reality of that poverty which they had hitherto only been anticipating. She endeavoured to impress upon them how little is necessary to comfort when ostentatious feelings are once dismissed.—

The airiness and quietness of the dwelling were placed in the most favourable points of view, and even the contracted size of the rooms was made to appear in the light of an advantage; and reasons for being well pleased with the humility of this place of refuge were sedulously and successfully sought.

With the calm energy of unpretending benevolence, she extracted, for the comfort of her dispirited parents, many an unexpected good out of the bitter cup of their afflictions. She presented to them a cheering view whenever circumstances admitted it; and when the flattering prospect was denied, she could lighten the pressure of misfortune by the meek and Christian principle of uncomplaining resignation.

CHAPTER XIV.

I will stand no more
On other's legs, nor build one joy without me.
If I be ever worth a house again
I'll build all inward: not a light shall ope
The common outway: no expense, no art,
No ornament, no door will I use there,
But raise all plain and rudely, like a rampire,
Against the false society of men.

CHAPMAN.

WEEK after week rolled on in dull succession, and the Mortons remained in the same state of humble and melancholy seclusion. Their society was almost limited to Sackville and Lord and Lady Malvern. Few of their acquaintance were then in town, and of these, still fewer had discovered the place of their retreat, or took the trouble of coming to see them. Such as did call were seldom received, for Mr. Morton has become timidly sensitive since his distress had been made public, and shrunk from a meeting with all who were not old friends, or bound to him by the ties of relationship. He exhibited, in this instance, a singular waywardness and contrariety of feeling. Shunning society, and professing, with truth, to be averse to a meeting with any but his most intimate acquaintance, he was still keenly alive to neglect, and seemed constantly haunted with a dread of being forgotten.

He had always been sensitive on this point, but he was much more so now. He was severely gall-

ed by a want of attention even in those persons whom he had no desire to see. The sight of a visiter's card could restore him to comparative good spirits; and when day after day had passed, and no friend had come to his door, his spirits visibly sunk, and he would occasionally speak with much bitterness of the ingratitude of the world, and the heartless indifference of society.

Persons in such a situation are somewhat prone to magnify the injustice of the neglect they suffer. They forget the principles upon which they acted in their days of prosperity, and expect returns which they had previously never anticipated.— They paid in tinsel, and seek their late reward in pure and solid ore. They think not that they have been repaid already in the same light coin which they dispensed. Is there a friend for whom they have incurred a sacrifice, on whom they have conferred a lasting benefit? From such let them require the same. But the light interchange of society has given them no such enviable claim.— They sought a temporary pleasure, and they gained it; and yet how bitterly can they exclaim against those associates who withhold their notice in the hour of reverse. They talk of ruin magnanimously incurred for the entertainment of those who now desert them. Ruin was in truth incurred; but it was for the gratification of a restless vanity: and, after all, the world, which they call ungrateful, is little more than sternly just.

Among the relations who called upon the Mortons, and whose visits they received with pleasure, was the young Duke of Swansea. The late duke, Lady Louisa's brother, had never been on terms of cordiality with his sister and her husband; but the present possessor of the title, much to his credit, had not chosen to inherit the uncharitableness of his father. He was a frank, open-hearted young

man, unaffected and unspoiled, and hitherto happily insensible to the attempts that had been made to impress him with a high opinion of himself. His abilities, perhaps, barely exceeded the moderate limits of tolerably good sense, and he was, moreover, indolent and careless. Nevertheless, a good disposition, and certain liveliness of manner, had ensured him a great degree of popularity. He was a particular favourite of Lady Louisa, who was quite as proud of her nephew as she was of any of her children.

One of her most favourite speculations was a marriage between him and one of her daughters; and though she could never have been accused of doing any thing to promote it, she certainly bore it constantly in mind. Lady Malvern, before her marriage, had first been selected as the future duchess; the prospective coronet was next transferred to Agnes; and, now since her unfortunate engagement, it had been destined, by her sanguine mother, for the youthful brow of Marianne. This futile piece of castle-building was now sufficient to occupy and interest the weak and vacant mind of poor Lady Louisa, and a visit from the duke was consequently regarded not merely as the visit of a relation, but as an event upon which hung the favourite project of her life.

One morning the duke called, stayed with them a long time, good humouredly tried to be pleased with the quietness of their situation, which he pretended to believe was chosen out of consideration for Lady Louisa's health, and promised to come and see them frequently. He talked chiefly to Agnes, and seemed much pleased with her, thereby causing no slight regret to Lady Louisa, who inwardly lamented the engagement, and her nephew's unprofitable waste of admiration on the wrong person. Of Marianne, whom he viewed

merely as a child, he took scarcely any notice; and Lady Louisa, almost felt angry with Agnes for engrossing an attention, by which she could never hope to profit.

The duke scarcely ventured to allude to the present distresses of the family; but almost the only part of their hardships which he gave any signs of perceiving, was the absence of amusement which it must entail upon Agnes; and his only act of practical kindness was directed to her. He thought she would like to ride, and wanted very much to lend her a horse, which he was sure would suit her.

“It will really,” said he, to Lady Louisa, “be a kindness in my cousin Agnes to take it; for it carries a lady remarkably well, and would only be spoiled by being ridden by a man.” Agnes, however, had nobody to accompany her, and the offer was declined.

The duke’s visit had been a welcome one to all, and they looked forward with pleasure to the promised repetition of it; but week after week passed on, and he never came. Mr. Morton, whose misfortunes had rendered him keenly susceptible to the slightest shadow of neglect, became very indignant at this want of attention. He wrought himself into a bad opinion, not only of his young relative, but of society in general, and, with the perversity of disappointment, was but too ready to judge, that even those who had hitherto shown no disposition to desert him, would prove equally neglectful in the end. Meanwhile, the duke’s omissions were such as he would perhaps have scarcely noticed under happier circumstances, nor must they, in fact, be regarded as proofs of an unfeeling disposition.

The duke as has been said, was perfectly, good natured, and willing to oblige; but he was also

careless, indolent, and forgetful. With him, to be out of sight, was too frequently to be out of mind: he had a large acquaintance; and, with scarcely any pursuit but that of amusement, he fancied that his time was unavoidably very much occupied. Had he once been made to understand that his discontinuance of attention to the Mortons was adding to the sense of their afflictions, he would have been much grieved, and would have hastened to repair his fault. But he had yet to learn the positive ills, that may result from mere sins of omission, and that the person who confines his thoughts to the selfish object of pleasing himself, may at the same time, "very innocently," as he would say, cause considerable pain to others.

The Duke of Swansea, had, however, an excuse, which, perhaps, in the opinions of some, may tend to exculpate him entirely. He had become a sudden and ardent admirer of one of the beauties of the day, and his adoration soon went to the full length of a proposal. He was accepted; and the matrimonial Alnascharism of poor Lady Louisa was fated to receive its sudden down-fall, from the announcement of this event one morning by Lady Malvern.

The Mortons received very frequent visits from Lady Malvern; but her presence did not often afford them much consolation. She was vain, weak, and frivolous, had no strength of mind, and seemed more oppressed by the sense of their calamities, than they even were themselves.—Spoiled by indulgence and prosperity, she rather aggravated their discontent, by overvaluing the importance of the advantages they had lost. She shuddered with an affectation of overstrained delicacy, at the horrors of their habitation, and wondered how they could exist in such a small

ill-furnished house, "so very, very far from every body." Her only modes of consolation were by talking to them as if their situations had remained unchanged,—proposing plans which were now unfeasible, and detailing the tittle-tattle of that gay world from which they were endeavouring to wean themselves. She pressed Agnes to enter into society, brought her invitations, and wished her to allow herself to be chaperoned as usual.

But Agnes resolutely declined mixing in the gaieties of general society. One of her motives was economy, a principle of self-denial, which, with her ample means, she little thought to have been so soon under the necessity of practising.—Her parents had now little to depend upon beyond her yearly allowance, which was all appropriated to their relief, and she had even parted with many valuable trinkets that she might contribute further to their comfort. Under these circumstances it was her object to reduce the expenses of the toilette, and abstain as much as she could from that costliness of attire which society would have required.

Lady Malvern could not, or would not, enter into the propriety of these considerations, and thought it strange and ridiculous that the heiress of thousands should stoop to the practice of such petty parsimony. She had frequent discussions with Agnes, on the subject of her unwillingness to go into society. Agnes thanked her for the kindness which induced her to press it, and assured her that she had no such wish.

"But that is so strange!" said Lady Malvern; "it is not natural at your age, not to wish to go to balls. It is what the world would call odd, and if it is odd it cannot be right."

"It might be odd," said Agnes, with a mourn-

ful smile, "if there was nothing to warrant my declining; but you must remember the peculiar circumstances in which we are placed."

"Yes, my dear, I do remember them; but I wish you would not allude to them so often. It is not necessary, and it is very distressing. Besides, things won't always remain as they are.—You know, you have said yourself, that you have hopes of making some arrangement."

"My fortune is not in my own hands."

"True, but you are to be married; and then—"

"It will be my husband's," replied Agnes, gravely.

The tone of her remark arrested for a while the train of Lady Malvern's thoughts. After a short pause, Agnes proceeded—"In the mean time, I wish to share, in every respect, the lot of our parents. They will necessarily be exposed to many privations of former pleasures. Society is among the enjoyments they must give up; and I think they will be more resigned if they see me bearing the same lot as themselves, and (as I hope I shall do) cheerfully. They will feel their misfortunes lighter; and I shall have a better right to comfort them, than if I were exempt from what they are obliged to bear, and could not know by experience how melancholy their situation is."

"That is very good in you, Agnes," said Lady Malvern, "and very kindly and properly meant; but, my dear creature, don't you think it will hurt my father and mother to suppose, (as they certainly must) that they are the means of debarring you from a great deal of amusement? Besides, if you went into society, you would be better able to entertain them. Think how delightful to return home from a party, and be able to tell them every thing you had seen and heard, and all the inquiries that had been made after them."

"I am afraid," said Agnes, sighing, "there would be little in ball-room inquiries that could give them much pleasure. Even if I amused them at the time, I should do them no kindness in the end. I will take care that they shall never have the pain of supposing that I have been deprived of pleasure by them. They well know that if I give up society, I do it voluntarily."

Lady Malvern was not convinced by the reasonableness of her sister's arguments; but she was struck with the admirable spirit of her self-devotion, and forbore to urge intreaties which she found to be unavailing.

CHAPTER XV.

La souveraineté parlementaire n'est au fait que la souveraineté du peuple, sortie du domaine de l'abstraction pour entrer dans celui de la réalité: ou plutôt elle est l'image terrestre de cette souveraineté de la raison à laquelle les hommes rendent hommage lorsque, par une convention salubre, ils donnent force de loi à l'opinion de la majorité, pourvu que cette opinion se légitime en subissant l'épreuve d'une libre et publique discussion.

BARON DE STAEL. *Lettres sur l'Angleterre.*

MR. MORTON'S resignation of the contest for Wichcombe was necessarily followed by the election of Lacy; and almost the whole time, since that event, had been passed by the latter in London, in attending to his parliamentary duties.—Lacy entered upon this new career under very favourable expectations. University honours, which had been, hitherto, the highest within his attainment, had shown him to be possessed of talent; and though it might reasonably be questioned, whether the objects, when gained, were commensurate with the exertion, they served, at any rate, as a tolerable criterion of his abilities. His talents were also tempered by moderation and a becoming diffidence in the unerringness of his own views. His parliamentary conduct was strictly in conformity with the liberality of his principles. He adhered to no particular party, and felt no magic, in the words, "Whig," or "Tory;" "Ministry," or "Opposition." Measures, not men, were his object. He saw, in the present organization of the state, the result of a long course of

slow and unremitting changes, and he knew no reason why the hand of innovation, which had been hitherto beneficial, should now be arrested. He foreboded no danger to the higher classes, from the increasing education of the lower; and believed that insurrections were more successfully fostered by ignorance than by knowledge. He saw a wide difference between a repeal of catholic disabilities, and an approbation of their tenets; thought them too weak, as a sect, to excite our apprehensions, and too strong, as a people, to be prudently repulsed. He considered, that were there influence such as their opponents believed, too much had been conceded already; and if not, why might not more be safely granted? He trusted that the energies and resources of the country might be best developed by free trade; was not sportsman enough to be blind to the evils of the existing Game Laws; and, though heir to a large landed property, was creditably disposed to listen to reason on the subject of corn.

Though possessed of a respectable share of eloquence, he did not wish to rush hastily into a display of oratory. He knew that the multifarious and weighty business of the House of Commons, did not allow it to be used, like an assembly for amateur debaters, for mere purposes of show or practice. He could not conscientiously speak, unless he had something new or important to say; and his good taste preserved him, from the commission of florid common-places.

Herbert's parliamentary career brought him into frequent contact with Sackville, who was also the representative of a borough; and he was enabled by this means, to form a truer estimate, of his character than he had hitherto done. He did not become privy to any instance of corruption in Sackville, or was able to convict him of political

profligacy; but he soon became sensible, that if he was really exempt from such offences, he was preserved by no other principle than prudence. There was an absence of high-mindedness in Sackville, a contempt of public spirit, and a disregard of beneficial measures, except in so far as they could be made subservient to the interests of a party. He delighted in artifice, and was proud of his knowledge of what he called parliamentary tactics. With him, to gull and overreach, were by no means a discreditable exercise of ability. He sympathized with the triumphs of successful chicanery, and never betrayed indignation or sorrow, on seeing honourable simplicity borne down by the efforts of a dexterous knave. He made a frequent parade of fine sentiments; but it was perceptible to the acute observer, that they came rather from the head than from the heart; and his real bias, inclined him to follow the tortuous paths of cunning.

These characteristics did not escape the quick perception of Lacy. From gratitude to Sackville for an act of deliverance, he felt bound in duty to put a favourable construction upon his words and actions; but he could not refuse to receive the evidence of his observation; and the more he saw of Sackville, the more strongly was he inspired with distrust. The conversation which once passed between himself and Agnes, then came to his recollection, and as her expressions respecting Sackville coincided in a remarkable degree with what he had now experienced, they tended to confirm his unfavourable impressions.

In connection with this train of thought, he remembered the suspicions once dropped by his father, respecting the probable chicanery practised to effect the engagement of marriage with Agnes; and there were circumstances, connected with other recent events, which almost seemed to justify the

belief of some treacherous underhand agency. The suspicions of Lacy were excited, and though he might sometimes mentally condemn them as uncharitable, they were not to be suppressed.

The success of Sackville's attempt to prejudice the mind of Mr. Morton against Lacy, by attributing to the latter a knowledge and approbation of the legal process, had been complete. The idea of Lacy's having plotted against Mr. Morton, was so artfully conveyed by Sackville to that gentleman, that he was not conscious that the first suggestion of it had not proceeded from himself. It was an impression which his former dislike of the Lacys, rendered him very prone to admit; and the idea being once entertained, Sackville dexterously dropped the character of the instigator, and irritated him by mock defences of his opponent, and feeble hopes that circumstances were not such as he suspected.

At length, when the impression had been sufficiently strengthened by treacherous resistance, he chose a fitting opportunity, and allowed the introduction of those confirmations which he had previously concerted with Allen. They amounted by no means to proofs, but they were so produced, as to have an equivalent effect upon the mind of Mr. Morton. Sackville knew that if any publicity were given to the accusation, Lacy would be able to clear himself, and it was necessary to deprive him of such an opportunity. For this purpose, he again wrought upon the mind of Mr. Morton, whose wayward feelings he could generally rule at pleasure. He impressed him with the impossibility of redress; the humiliation of an acknowledgment that he had been thus over-reached, and the malicious pleasure with which the world would triumph over the prostrate dupe, and hail the glories of successful treachery. He led Mr. Morton to feel,

that it was better to bury his wrongs in his own bosom; and that as there was no evidence of that sort of unfairness on the part of Lacy which would tend to vitiate the election, his unavailing complaints would only serve to excite the derision of his opponent.

By these means, Sackville at the same time precluded the exculpation of Lacy, and embittered the enmity of Morton; and the latter made a positive determination, that nothing should induce him to see the man whom he now thought he had such just and ample cause for detesting. Lacy, ignorant of the feelings with which he was regarded, called twice at Mr. Morton's and was not admitted. The first denial he conceived to be accidental, but having been repulsed a second time, he began to question with himself, whether Mr. Morton objected to society, or had any peculiar grudge towards him. In this doubt he applied to Sackville. The answer was carelessly given, but it tended to reassure him.

"It must be shyness rather than resentment," said Sackville. "Why should he bear you any ill will? He can have nobody to thank for what has happened, but himself. The fact is, that his unfortunate circumstances have made him almost a recluse. He is ashamed of his present poverty, and does not like that it should be witnessed." This seemed a very reasonable explanation, and it was so naturally given, that Lacy saw no ground for distrusting its correctness.

CHAPTER XVI.

La ville est partagée en diverses sociétés, qui sont comme autant de petites républiques, qui ont leurs loix, leurs usages, leur argon, et leurs mots pour rire.

BRUYERE.

AMONG those whom Mr. Morton saw with most repugnance and self-upbraiding, were his humble relations the Bagshawes. They were his equals in family, though not in connection, and were now his superiors in wealth. They now stood almost in the same relative situation to him, in which he once appeared to his less affluent neighbours, and he viewed in them a practical satire on his former self. He felt a strange contrariety of feeling towards them, and hardly knew how they should be treated. His conscience accused him of having slighted them in his prosperous days; and pride, under the mask of a love of consistency, suggested that it would be hardly becoming to show much friendliness and attention now to those whom he had formerly avoided.

But then, they had once done him a kindness; and were still truly anxious to assist him, and they evinced such genuine good-heartedness, and total forgetfulness of all previous slights, that Mr. Morton's pride gave way, and he could not refrain from a gracious reception. It was perhaps fortunate that they were vulgar; for the equilibrium was thereby more than restored. Extractions being equal, Mr.

Morton would have had nothing but alliance to set in the scale against the influence of their wealth, if he could not have borne down their vulgarity by the *eclat* of his own refinement. Had they been well-bred people, they might, notwithstanding their plebian name, have had some chance of mingling slightly in that class of society to which he had been admitted; but, as it was, their manners rendered it impossible, and his jealousy was thereby appeased. He would on no account have owned, even to himself, that he had thus regarded them in the possible situation of rivals; but, nevertheless, such were his feelings.

Lady Louisa, who troubled her head much less about the Bagshawes, never viewed them in that light. Her consciousness of high and undisputed rank, entirely exempted her from such comparisons. She did not conceive it possible that Mrs. Bagshawe and her daughter should ever quit the character of respectful inferiors, and she was satisfied. She was quite conscious of their vulgarity; but it was not a physical annoyance, and she was not acutely sensible of any others. She had occasionally gone so far as to think it a pity that her husband should have such low relations—but that was more his affair than hers; and it did not appear to her that she had any reason for being violently ashamed of them.

Mr. Bagshawe, since we saw him at Huntley Park, had received a considerable accession of fortune by the death of one of his relations. He had at length resigned the profession of an attorney, which he had been latterly following rather lazily; and, in obedience to the urgent and oft-repeated representations of his wife and daughters, had, early in the spring, quitted the legal quarter of the town, and given up his old neighbours and a good house for a worse and dearer one in Lower

Grosvenor Street. He himself was not ambitious of change, and rather regretted it, when he compared the respective comforts of the two residences: but the ladies absolutely refused to stoop to such petty considerations. The situation, they thought, must amply compensate for all inferiority. Within sight of Grosvenor-Square, and in the great thoroughfare from thence to Bond-Street, even a hovel must be preferable to the best of houses in those regions which have been proclaimed in parliament as unknown. To Mrs. Bagshawe it seemed like a change of being, and she felt as if every thing that society could offer was now within her reach. Who shall describe the pleasure with which she viewed her new direction! She was even half sorry that the printer of her visiting card had deprived her of the pleasure of writing it there.

I cannot find that in any other city, ancient or modern, this "pride of place" has acquired such strength as in London. Wonderful is the magic which lies in those words, a "good situation;" laudible the discrimination of some of its inhabitants. It would be almost possible, with their assistance, to make out a scale of the comparative gentility of the streets and squares. The claims of the latter would be easily settled. St. James's and Grosvenor-Square would look down like rival potentates from a proud height of dignity on their humbler brethren of Berkley, Hanover, and Portman; and these, in return, may discharge their contempt on the minor northern fry of Cavendish; Manchester, Bryanstone, and Montague. But these can still treat others as inferiors. Many and nice are the gradations of square-hood: numerous are its steps of precedence. Even the distant Finsbury, separated from the "world" like ancient Britain, may have neighbours, in that remote and half-discovered region, with whom it may

think it "foul scorn" to be classed; and these again may have inferiors, the knowledge of whose existence has not yet travelled westward of the meridian of Charing-cross.

"Tell me your company, and I will tell what you are," says an adage of no mean wisdom; but London would seem to scorn such extensive data, and limits the inquiry to "Tell me your street." At the same time, singular to say, it is almost the only place where vicinity hardly ever produces acquaintance: it would rather seem to repel it; for a next-door neighbour is proverbially unknown. Wherein, then, consists the mighty magic of situation? In truth we are somewhat insensible to its influence; but we know that many feel it strongly. Difficult as it may sometimes be to define the peculiar advantages of what is called a good situation, it is easy to trace the feeling which assigns such false importance to these minute and trivial distinctions. Look at the dense throng of London society, and this will furnish the explanation. It is a scene of desperate rivalry, where crowds press on like mariners from a wreck, filling to the utmost the frail boats that are to bear them to the shore, and each feeling that he should be safe if his neighbour were drowned. It is an over-crowded arena, where advancement is open to all who choose to struggle for it. There are no broad, impassible lines of demarcation; nothing that compels the aspirant to despair of admission to any extent of social honours: every claim, however trivial, may conduce to the desired success; and the pretensions of each individual are often made up of a number of particulars, too insignificant to be separately considered. Thus the resources of vanity are taxed to the utmost; and he who can assert no other superiority over his immediate rivals, who are running with him the race of society, will

probably discover that—he lives in a better situation.

The Bagshawes, in their migration, did but follow the feeling of the million; but they (and principally the lady) had augured too much from the happy transition. Mrs. Bagshawe seemed to have thought that their change of neighbourhood would necessarily be followed by a change of society: but she had not sufficiently considered that there is no neighbourhood in London; and two months had passed without any flattering results. She looked wistfully at the Court Guide, where she saw with pleasure their homely name figuring in the list by the side of titles; but she found that she was quite as far from any acquaintance with these personages as when two miles of building lay between them, Knockers were plied to the right and left: but such tantalizing peals seldom thundered at her door; and though the progress of her carriage at night was often checked by the throngs that flocked to neighbouring routs, she was not a whit the more invited. She also saw less than formerly of her old acquaintance in the distant quarter that she had quitted. She questioned herself whether she had been guilty of any neglect, and feared, in the simplicity of her heart, that her friends, might accuse her of growing “fine.” But they had not paid her the compliment of so unmerited a suspicion. She had gained nothing in their eyes by her migration; and if they now called upon her less frequently, it was for this plain reason, that she was farther out of their way.

The house to which the Bagshawes now most willingly bent their course was that of the Mortons. Pity for their misfortunes produced a greater friendliness of disposition towards them, and they felt a good-natured pleasure in paying them attention. A disciple of Rochefoucault might per-

haps have discovered that there was something in the misfortunes of the Mortons that was not entirely displeasing to them; and it might also be suggested that they hoped to profit by their relations' long acquaintance with the fashionable world. But it is an ungracious task to extract the little selfish alloy that links within the golden promise of a praise-worthy action.

Civility's last best vent in London is always an invitation to dinner. Routs and balls are for bowing acquaintance; but a dinner is the pledge of intimacy. As such the Bagshawes viewed it; and as such they proposed it to the Mortons. Their proposal, however, had been twice made without success. Lady Louisa pleaded ill health, and Mr. Morton had an insuperable objection to stirring from home. At length, during the Easter recess, Tom Morton being come up from Oxford, and Mr. Bagshawe's "eldest hope" from Cambridge, it was suggested, that perhaps Miss Morton would not object to accompany her brother, and dine in Lower Grosvenor Street. It was a proposal that was not much liked either by Agnes or her parents; but a wish to avoid giving offence to the Bagshawes induced them to comply.

CHAPTER XVII.

Cette fatuité de quelques femmes de la ville, que cause en elles une mauvaise imitation de celles de la cour, est quelque chose de pire que la grossièreté des femmes du peuple, et que la rusticité des villageoises: elle a sur toutes deux l'affectation de plus.

BRUYERE.

ON the appointed day, at a late hour (for the Bagshawes, thinking lateness fashionable, determined to be correct in that at least,) Agnes and her brother prepared to Lower Grosvenor Street.— They were very cordially received: Mr. Bagshawe exerted his best powers of speech to give the welcome; and his lady, glowing under a large red turban, as gorgeous as a full blown peony, squeezed the small white fingers of Agnes, between her own fat hot hands, and dragged her off to the fire-side. She then introduced her immediately to a heavy-looking elderly couple of the name of Jones, who were said to have remembered seeing her when, as Mrs. Bagshawe said, exemplifying by action, she was “not so high.”

Who among our readers, lately arrived at womanhood, or manhood, will not sympathize with Agnes? Few of the minor miseries that wait on introductions are more annoying than the being presented, or rather exhibited, to under-bred people who had seen you when you were a child. Topic and interest are all on their side; and you, the unhappy presentée, have nothing to say, and little to

feel, except the oppressive difficulty of being sufficiently grateful for the extent of their memory, and the curiosity with which they regard you. Then come the personal observations—the growth—the likeness—and the alteration—and the “never should have known you;” or the assurances of instantaneous recognition; to neither of which remarks have you any thing to reply; and the good people con you over as unceremoniously as if you were still the child they left you, and seem almost surprised to find that you behave like a grown up person.

All this did Agnes undergo from Mr. and Mrs. Jones; a Mr. and Mrs. Jones whom she was not conscious of having ever seen before, and of whose history she knew nothing. She envied her brother for having “bloomed unseen” in his days of childhood, and for his present exemption from all recognition. In consideration of her own distresses, she could hardly feel inclined to reprove the repulsiveness of his bow to them, and the abruptness with which he turned away from them to talk to Richard Bagshawe, whom half a year passed at Cambridge, since we met him last at Huntley Park, had in some degree tended to improve.

College life was a topic of common interest to the two young men, and they began to discuss the comparative merits of the sister Universities. The conversation that ensued might have astonished an uninitiated listener, who should expect to hear English flowing, in its utmost purity, from the lips of two students fresh from these celebrated seats of learning. But the English of their halls and combination-rooms bears too often a comparative purity with the Latin of the schools. Universities have their shibboleth, as well as the Ring. These two young men were both in their freshman's year, and were rather unnecessarily proud of their newly-

acquired jargon. They talked of men with whom they had *wined*; the factious struggles of "Town" and "Gown;" the necessary evils of "scouts" and "gyps;" "battles," meaning those of the buttery; and "commons," not the third estate, but of that kind which are sometimes called short. Then spake they of their studies. The Cantab ridiculed a Johnian, who *muzzed* hard the last term for a Senior *Op.*, that he might stand for *the* medal, but only got a *wooden spoon*; and the Oxonian calmly reproved the presumption of a man who had *taken up the Poets* for his "Little go," and, after all, was *under the line*. The administration of justice was compared. The case was cited of a Brazen-Nose man who was threatened with *rustication* for merely *cutting* hall and chapel; and the sister University supplied an instance of one who was *put out of sizings and commons* for refusing to *cap* the dean. Various other cases were produced and compared, including crimes not mentioned in the Decalogue, and punishments the names of which are not to be found in Johnson's dictionary.

While this classical dialogue was taking place, Mrs. Bagshawe, who had made Agnes fully acquainted with Mr. and Mrs. Jones, was entertaining all three with full particulars respecting the purchase of their present house. Its conveniences, appurtenances, lease, ground-rent, and former possessor, all had their places in her narration; and the detail might have been wire-drawn to a still greater length, if her attention had not been suddenly directed to the more interesting subject of her neighbours. The second Miss Bagshawe, who had been amusing herself with looking out of the window, broke in upon her tale by exclaiming aloud that Lord John Wharton was just returning from his morning ride.

"Dear me, how late he is!" said Mrs. Bagshawe, with all the interest of an intimate acquaintance. "But he is generally late; and which horse is he riding, Lucy? Is it the gray or the black?"

"The bay," said Miss Lucy, who seemed to have been a critical observer of Lord John's horses.

"I am sorry it isn't the gray," said her mother, "that Mrs. Jones might have taken a look at it. His lordship rides a charming grey horse sometimes, Ma'am. He is a very elegant young man, is Lord John; and Lady Jane, his sister, is a very elegant young woman. She goes out a riding too. They live close by at their father's house, the Marquis of Northallerton's, next door but one, Ma'am, and that is the reason we see so much of them."

"You are acquainted with them, then?" said Agnes.

"Why," said Mrs. Bagshawe, with a slight degree of hesitation, "we know them very well—by sight; but I cannot exactly say that we know them, at present, to speak to; but some of our servants are quite intimate with some of the marquis's people, and we see and hear a good deal of them, one way or another."

Agnes felt more inclined to blush than smile at the rude notion which poor Mrs. Bagshawe evidently entertained, that the intimacy of the servants in the respective households, should be likely to promote the acquaintance of the masters; and she feared least her deep-dyed vulgarity should be too apparent even to the dull perceptions of Mr. and Mrs. Jones. But one glance at their sober countenances was sufficient to re-assure her, and she earnestly hoped that no person of a more sensitive temperament might be added to the party.

At this moment, Mr. Bagshawe pulled out his watch, said something, with an air at once waggish and complaining, of its being "half past dinner time, and time to dine again," and added, that he hoped Mr. Lacy would not prove himself Mr. *Lazy*, but would soon favour them with his presence. Agnes quite forgot to pay to this inimitable pun, the expected compliment of a smile, in her surprise at the very unwelcome recurrence of such a name, and she found upon inquiry that it was the very Mr. Lacy whom, under present circumstances, she was most unwilling to meet. In addition to her natural reluctance to see the vulgarity of her relations, the Bagshawes, exposed to his discriminating eye, she had many other reasons for wishing to avoid him. Bound as she was to Sackville, to whom she could feel no attachment, she did not wish to be exposed to the society of him whom she so strongly preferred.

The recent misfortunes of her family had made her shrink from the first collision with every person who had known them in happier days, and above all, she had been taught to consider Lacy as the secret cause of their late misfortunes. It was Sackville's aim to prejudice her mind, no less than her father's, and he had not been utterly unsuccessful. She earnestly wished to think the accusations untrue; but she had nothing to oppose to those circumstances which Sackville seemed anxious rather to conceal and palliate, than to exaggerate or obtrude. Both in obedience to her father's wishes, and out of charity towards Lacy, she had abstained from mentioning the mischievous interference of which he was suspected. She longed to hear his vindication, but she knew not how to obtain it, for it was difficult to inform him of the feelings with which he was regarded by her father, without incurring the danger of another hostile meeting.

Her father's irritability had been increased by his misfortunes; and previous occurrences had led her to fear that an angry altercation might terminate as seriously as before.

She therefore considered it the part of prudence, to withhold from Lacy all information of the charges which had been brought against him; but at the same time to try to discover how far he was conscious of having merited an injurious accusation. Scarcely had she decided how to receive him, than a carriage was heard to stop at the door—then a knocking—then footsteps on the stairs, and Lacy was announced.

After accosting Mr. Bagshawe, who met him at the door, Lacy's eyes were naturally directed first towards the lady of the house, and it was not until he had exchanged a few sentences with her, that he looked round at the rest of the company. Then it was that, turning from Mrs. Bagshawe with the intention of bestowing a bow of acknowledgment on her daughters, he first became sensible of the presence of Agnes. He almost started when he saw her, and visibly changed colour; and surprise and embarrassment were apparent in his countenance. Agnes perhaps looked more composed; but her heart beat violently, and she felt as if she could hardly breathe.

There was much passing in the minds of each that must tend to render this meeting agitating and painful. The duel, the election, Lacy's engagement to Miss Hartley, and the discovery of Mr. Morton's embarrassment, had all taken place since the last time that they had even seen each other, and each of these circumstances brought with it a long train of agitating thoughts. The last time they had met, except in the midst of crowds, was on the morning after the ball at Westcourt, and in that interview they had allowed their mutual sen-

timents to escape, and had uttered words that could not be recalled or forgotten. They were each conscious of the necessity that existed for repressing all indication of what they felt, and of entrenching themselves behind the defences of frigid politeness, and the safest common-place.

It seemed difficult to avoid subjects possessing any degree of interest to either, that might not endanger their mutual composure. Inquiries after Mr. Morton and Lady Louisa were timidly made by Lacy, and very briefly answered by Agnes. Sackville's was an interdicted name, as well as that of Miss Hartley. Lord and Lady Malvern might more safely be approached, but a conversation beginning with them had led somehow or other to the Applebys at whose house Lacy and Agnes had first met. They talked to each other as if it were a duty, a penance, which, however unwilling, they were bound to perform. To Lacy, it would have seemed a sort of sacrilege to turn his attention from Agnes to any other person, and he had not the power to quit her side, though conscious that he wished it.

But Agnes herself dispelled the painful charm that held him. Her brother was standing near him, and she begged to introduce him to Lacy, and the latter then talked to him till dinner was announced. Neither Agnes nor Lacy wished to be near each other at table. Agnes accepted, with more pleasure than she could ever have expected, the arm of Mr. Jones; and Lacy, in spite of Mrs. Bagshawe's hints to him to "take Miss Morton," persisted in offering his services to the lady of the mansion. They succeeded in being far asunder, and were as widely separated as was possible. They were even favoured in their object, by the unnecessary size of the table, and two blanks left by defaulting guests, whose absence Mr. Bagshawe feelingly deplored.

Agnes had been too much occupied by the many reflections which Lacy's presence had conjured up, to think with uneasiness of the impression which the vulgarity of her relations was likely to make upon him. It must, however, be said in justice to the Bagshawes, that they appeared to much greater advantage at their own table than elsewhere, and that their entertainment was rather creditable, and served very tolerably, to support the pretensions which they thought suitable to their new abode. Their plate looked as well as if it had been a hundred years in the family, and their cook had given them as good a dinner as if they had been fashionables of the first distinction. The "pomp and circumstance" of polite society are too much at the command of wealth, to be denied to the monied vulgar; and, consequently, those who seek for characteristic distinctions must generally look for them rather in the persons themselves than in their tables and establishments.

The present scene suggested a similar thought to Lacy when he was addressed by Mrs. Bagshawe, who asked him to take "a few *grass*" (meaning asparagus) with his chicken. Conversation had not entirely slumbered. Mr. Bagshawe had enlivened his end of the table by firing off, very successfully, a favourite joke upon a saddle of mutton.

"Mr. Jones, do you like it cut saddle-wise, or bridle-wise?" said the wily Mr. Bagshawe.

"Saddle-wise, if you please," said the unsuspecting Mr. Jones.

"I like it cut bridle-wise," was the prompt reply, "for then I am sure to have a *bit* in my mouth."

After some reflection, Mr. Jones rewarded the punster with a hearty laugh, and ended by protesting that he had never heard that joke before. Mr. Jones was no joker, but he did his best, in his

way, to be entertaining and instructive. He was one of those persons who have a genius for doubting; and he favoured the company with many indications of his peculiar talent. He doubted whether the world was grown wiser: whether Macadamization would succeed in streets: whether the Whigs would ever come into office; whether popery was not as dangerous as ever: and whether such a town as London had any right to a university.

Meanwhile Mrs. and Miss Bagshawe had been ranging with Lacy through the classic land of Italy. They had been at Florence, Rome, and Naples; and though they could not talk of their “Raphaels, Correggios, and stuff,” so fluently as Mr. Bagshawe, they had much to say on the society, scenery and accommodations.

“We were at *Room*, Mr. Lacy,” said Mrs. Bagshawe. “I suppose you have been there. Every body goes to *Room* now-a-days. It is a delightful place in the season. To my mind it is as good as Bath or Cheltenham every bit,—only there are no waters to drink—it does not come up to them there to be sure.”

“That is very true,” said Lacy, suppressing a smile with some difficulty. “I had never considered that. What then do you think can be the reason why so many from our country go there?”

“I suppose they go for the ceremonies,” replied Mrs. Bagshawe. “Dear heart! what a sight of ceremonies there are! We made a point of going to them all. You know the saying, Mr. Lacy, ‘Do at *Room* as they do at *Room*.’ And so, as I said, we made a point of going to all the ceremonies. We saw horses blessed, and lambs blessed, and palm trees, and candles, and I don’t know what besides: and we saw a doll carried round the Harry Scaly Church, with drums and trumpets

playing before it, like any thing, and go out and bless the people. What a deal of blessing there is there! As Mr Bagshawe used to say, it is a blessed place altogether. But the Holy Week!—that was the finest thing of all: and I believe I may safely say that I went through every bit of it. I cannot think now how I bore it; but I believe I am pretty tough. A gentleman said to me, ‘Ma’am, you must have the strength of a horse,’ and I don’t believe it was merely a compliment. Really there used to be terrible crowding and squeezing sometimes. Eliza, do you remember the day when the Pope waited at table upon those pilgrim people?—What work we had to get to see him! There was a little box, like a pen for poultry, stuck up in the middle of the room, and I knew it was the best place for seeing, so up I went. Somebody told me it was meant for the *grandeos*. ‘Oh!’ says I, ‘a fig for your *grandeos*—I am not come all this way to be put about by them!’ So on we pushed, didn’t we, Eliza? I didn’t see any thing after all; but I *did* get in, I will say *that*.”

Eliza, whose disposition seemed less enterprising than her mother’s, said, with a languid air, that she doubted whether they had been repaid for their exertions. “What I enjoyed most,” said she, “were our parties of pleasure.”

“Oh, yes, the parties of pleasure,” said Mrs. Bagshawe. “I shall never forget that night at the Coliseum. We went there by moonlight, Mr. Lacy, and took a cold collation with us, and had our supper, quite comfortable; and a very merry party we were. Eliza, do you remember Mr. Sharp carrying off a bottle of soda water into one of the dark passages, and making the cork fly, and groaning, to make us think that somebody had shot himself? And then his telling us all about the *banditti* coming down and hiding themselves there?

And then you know, you and Miss Spratt went to look for an echo, and Dick, a rogue, stole round the other way and made one; and when you hallooed; he hallooed, and when you clapped your hands, he clapped his hands. I have laughed many a good time since with thinking of that scheme of Dick's. Dick, we were talking about you. Do you remember what fun you had at the Coliseum?"

"Ay, precious good fun," said Dick, and went on eating as before.

"It is a curious place, that Coliseum," pursued Mrs. Bagshawe, turning again to Lacy. "If you ever observed, Mr. Lacy, they have built up that outer wall afresh at the two ends. I doubt whether they will ever be able to finish it all round. They generally do things by halves in Italy."

"But; mamma, it is a ruin," interposed Miss Bagshawe; "you know it was never meant to be finished."

"Well—true—I suppose it was not. I cannot say that I am very partial to ruins. I don't think many of them are very ornamental. Some folks are very fond of them. What is your taste, Mr. Lacy?"

"The more perfect a building is, the better I like it," said Lacy.

"Well, that is precisely my way of thinking," continued Mrs. Bagshawe, pleased at the supposed accordance of their tastes. She then proceeded to touch upon the society of Rome and other Anglo-Italian cities, and afforded Lacy a good deal of amusement by the peculiarity of her views, and the many strange anecdotes with which her remarks were interlarded. They might, perhaps, have afforded amusement to some of *our* readers, but a taste for personality is too much the literary vice of the day; and we do not wish to indulge

the growing mania even by giving insertion to Mrs. Bagshawe's *on-dits*.

Dinner at length was ended, and so was the sedentary conclave held by the gentleman afterwards, one of those reverential tributes to the wisdom of our ancestors, which we trust the good sense and sobriety of the present age will soon induce it to discontinue.

Lacy left the dining-room with a strong desire to engage Agnes again in conversation. Her presence seemed to give him pain, and yet there was an attraction in it, which he could not resist, and much had occurred to his mind during their separation at the dinner table, which he now wished to say. He thought he perceived in her manner a more than necessary degree of reserve, and he longed to penetrate the motives, and discover what were the feelings with which she really regarded him.

The experiment was difficult and hazardous, considering their respective situations. But at the moment he thought not of that, but merely of the indulgence of what seemed a reasonable curiosity. Some arrivals had been heard during the stay of the gentleman in the dining room; and Lacy trusted that this influx might favour his object, and enable him to escape more easily from the clutches of Mrs. and Miss Bagshawe.

On entering the drawing-room, he found many fresh visitors; and after undergoing one or two introductions at the hands of Mrs. Bagshawe, he looked round for Agnes. But unhappily he found her quite unapproachable, closely hemmed in by other ladies, so that he could have said nothing to her above a whisper that would not have been audible to the whole coterie. He also unguardedly came within the influence of Mrs. Bagshawe's notice and was again compelled to talk and listen to her.

She began upon the subject of music, preparatory, as it afterwards appeared to a performance by Miss Bagshawe. "I was thinking, Mr. Lacy," said she, "whether I had ever seen you at the Opera."

Lacy believed not, having never had the pleasure of meeting her there.

"Why, no," said Mrs. Bagshawe; "and indeed, at present, you would not know where to look for us; for the fact is, we have no regular box. I believe we must have one next season; and, indeed," pursued she, putting on a prudent face, and endeavouring to mask the loftiness of her aspirations under the plea of a little economy, "I am not sure that it would not be the cheaper way, if one is to go to the Opera much, for boxes are *ris* of late, and there is no end of dabbling about, now a box here, and now a box there, and one is never settled and comfortable. What do you advise, Sir?"

"To take a box for the season," said Lacy, "if you prefer it."

"Well, I am sure I am glad to hear you think so. We cannot come on without the Opera no how. I hope you like Madame Pasta, Sir. I cannot agree with any body that does not like Madame Pasta. I only wish she would not stick so to her Italian. - I do long to hear her sing a right good English song. Why cannot she give us 'God save the King,' and 'Rule Britannia,' now and then, like Madame Catalani? Are you partial to English songs, Sir?"

Lacy said he was.

"Eliza, Mr. Lacy, likes English songs: cannot you sing us one or two? There is a song I used to sing—'Tell me, bubbling echo, why.'"

"*Babbling* echo," said Miss Bagshawe.

"It used to be 'bubbling' in my book," said

her mother; "but never mind the words, only sing it."

But the young lady remonstrated, and said she could not sing English music; she had not learned the style; she was only equal to the easy cadences of Rossini; and, accordingly, she sat down, and trilled away at an air out of 'Semiramide.'

The air was well chosen, being a noisy one, and consequently imposing no check upon conversation. Soft plaintive airs are decidedly most prejudicial to the interests of general society. They produce attention, spread an awful sense of decorum over the company, and lull them gradually into silence. They are a shameful infringement upon the liberty of the tongue—whereas nobody is afraid to chatter under the cover of a spirited bravura.

The music had caused a movement in the room. Those who were tired of their neighbours took advantage of the opportunity to change their places; and among these was Agnes. Lacy was attentive to the opportunity which these new arrangements might give him. He saw a vacant seat by the side of that which Agnes had taken, and he immediately occupied it.

"I am sorry," said he, lowering his voice so as to be heard only by her, "not to have had the pleasure of seeing Mr. Morton since our meeting at the election. I hope he knows that I took the liberty of calling upon him twice."

"My father knows it," replied Agnes; "and if he has not acknowledged your civility, I hope you can excuse him. You know our present circumstances—I need not try to disguise them—they have depressed him a good deal, and made him rather averse to society, and less attentive to form than before."

"I can easily imagine it," said Lacy; "but I hope you will not think that I was induced to speak

by any foolish stickling for ceremony. Pray, if you can, give Mr. Morton to understand that I shall not wish to draw him into any sort of return. Perhaps I ought to apologize for having ventured to intrude; but we met last as opponents. It was that circumstance which made me anxious to see him."

"Had you, then, reason to suppose that he would bear you any ill will?" said Agnes.

"God forbid!" replied Lacy; "nor do I see any foundation for such an idea. The contest was conducted with as little warmth as was possible; and we shook hands on the day of our last meeting. But still, we were opponents; and, having so met, I was desirous of seeing him again. Do not, however, suppose that I am inclined to press it. Only tell me that you think a visit would be considered intrusive, and I will abstain for the future."

Agnes looked perplexed.

"I am not authorized," said she, "to tell you any thing of the kind; but I hope you will not be offended if I give you my own impressions. They are, that my father, under present circumstances, had rather not see you. He scarcely allows himself to be visible to any but his particular friends."

She turned away her head after she had said this, as if wishing to put a stop to the conversation; and presently rose and walked to the instrument. She soon afterwards made her departure, without having afforded Lacy any further opportunity of addressing her; and he himself, having then lost the only object which made the party tolerable to him, presently followed her example.

CHAPTER XVIII.

True virtue is like precious odours—sweeter the more incensed and crushed.

BACON.

LACY felt, with sorrow, that his former, and now hopeless attachment to Agnes, was strongly awakened by the past interview. He had seen her in a new point of view, and one in which she was especially calculated to interest his feelings. He looked back to the period when she first won his affections. He remembered how the brilliant fascination of her beauty had been heightened by the elegant vivacity of her manners, and the playful spirit of her conversation. These were now absent; but, in their place, there was a dignified, yet plaintive composure, a charm which the hand of sorrow had softened rather than dimmed, and which seemed to make her image sink still deeper into his heart. Like the calm and mournful beauty of a moonlight scene, it possessed a more enchainning interest than all the sunny blaze of her former attractions. Something might, perhaps, be attributed to the circle in which he met her. He thought he was seeing her to a disadvantage; but he was mistaken. The effect of contrast only rendered her natural elegance more conspicuous.

There was a superiority about Agnes which was strongly felt by the Bagshawes, and never so much as now. Miss Bagshawe, with all, those uneasy

aspirations after elegance and fashion, which, in half-bred people, are apt to lead to affectation, was tolerably quick and observant. She had long since entertained a jealous sense of the superior refinement of her cousin; but at that time Agnes had great advantages in point of society and connections, and had been raised upon a pedestal of fashion which precluded any thing like a fair comparison; and Miss Bagshawe could be comforted by the reflection that, but for these adventitious aids, the superiority might be very doubtful; and that, if places had been changed, the scale might even turn in her favour. But now the anticipated change was almost made. *They* were in possession of increased affluence, and living in a fashionable quarter, while the Mortons were depressed to poverty, and buried in the homely seclusion of the Alpha Cottages. Agnes had renounced society, and had never in her conversation made any allusion to the gaieties of the season. Miss Bagshawe, though never seen at parties that were at all of a select description, had made good use of her eyes at the Park, at the Opera, and at a crowded charity ball, which she had attended the week before, and had gained a tolerable knowledge of the exterior of most persons of distinction, and could talk about them almost as fluently as if they were her intimate acquaintance. She had noticed several remarkable flirtations—could tell how Lady Such-a-one looked—knew, by sight, most of the patronesses for the last fancy ball, and could mention what ladies belonged to such and such quadrilles—was *au fait* on the subject of what was or what was not worn at present, and could support her opinion, in case of need, by citing the example of the Duchess of So-and-so. She had also been abroad, while Agnes had not. In short, she now seemed to have many advantages over her cousin,

and to be in every respect qualified—aided, as she was, by costlier attire—to be the more brilliant person of the two.

Yet all this availed her nothing. The superiority was still as conspicuous as before; and it was the more striking because it seemed to be preserved unconsciously, and without effort. That Agnes should be able to renounce and disregard all to which Miss Bagshawe was hopelessly aspiring, was also a reflection that conveyed a strong and humiliating sense of the real distance which still existed between them. But her admiration of Agnes was no longer blended with envy of her superior advantages; on the contrary, pity for her present trials served to convert it into generous regard.

Lacy's parting interview with Agnes was not entirely satisfactory, though there was perhaps nothing in her words to which he could attach an unpleasant import. He was disquieted, less by what she said than by what she had failed to say. There was also a measured coldness, a careful selection of phrase, differing widely from her usual address, an unwillingness to re-assure him, and a chilling reserve of manner, which induced him to surmise that in the domestic circle of the Mortons his name was not received as one of happy omen.

These thoughts pursued him long after he had quitted the presence of Agnes. With a view to satisfy his mind, he called upon Mr. Bagshawe, whom he knew to have frequent communication with the Mortons. He spoke to him in a confidential tone; he mentioned the long period of coolness which had existed between the families; the duel with Mr. Morton; their opposition at the election; Mr. Morton's present unwillingness to see him; and the irritable nature of his disposition. He then stated his own fears lest that gentleman should conceive himself to have any sufficient

grounds for ill will, and indulge his former feelings of dislike. He entreated him to discover, as delicately as he could, whether any such feelings existed, and assured him that in so doing he might consider himself as acting the part of a mediator between them.

Mr. Bagshawe, who, in spite of his affectation and pompous airs in society, had a good deal of shrewdness, which had been sharpened by his legal practice, entered readily into Lacy's ideas, and promised to do his best to set his mind at ease upon the point in question. It was undoubtedly Lacy's attachment to Agnes, excited anew by their late meeting, which rendered him so sensitively solicitous of the good opinion of her family, and so easily wounded by her apparent coldness. He dared not own his sentiments even to himself, plighted as he now was to another. Led away by the generosity and delicacy of his feelings, which, during a period of illness, had been so unfairly wrought upon to engage himself to one whom he could not love, he had often bitterly regretted the fancied necessity of his sacrifice. Time and cool observation had also rendered him somewhat sceptical as to the extent of that attachment which Miss Hartley was supposed to feel for him. Still nothing had occurred which warranted a breach of the engagement; and though the parting, when he went up to London after the election, had been conducted with a very philosophical spirit of composure, they had since that time maintained the proprieties of correspondence with sufficient regularity, and had contrived to write more tenderly than they had ever found it possible to speak.

The motives by which Lacy and Agnes were each of them led to dispose of their hands in opposition to their affections, were, viewed as sacrifices, certainly meritorious; but they involved an infringement of obligations, perhaps higher than

those which they were then regarding. The marriage vow is a solemn engagement to "love and honour;" and it may be questioned whether, under any circumstances, of however urgent a nature, it can properly be entered into by those who feel a distrust of their own ability to fulfil its important injunctions.

But this balance of duties is too nice and difficult to be settled satisfactorily by any but the calm observer. They who are themselves interested in the result, are ever liable to be swayed by feeling, rather than by judgment; and their errors, if they are not of the heart, must be treated with comparative leniency by those who, with the best intentions, may still be weak and erring as themselves.

One morning, about a week after Lacy's meeting with Agnes, he received a visit from Mr. Bagshawe, who came to tell him the result of an interview with Mr. Morton. After tantalizing Lacy for some time, with a wordy account of the adroitness with which he brought the conversation to turn upon him, he proceeded to unfold the state of Mr. Morton's sentiments.

Here Lacy stopped him. "Excuse my interruption," he said; "but I beg that you will let me first assure you, that I have no wish to hear any thing that has been mentioned by Mr. Morton under the pledge of secrecy. I am certain that you can have no intention to commit any such breach of confidence: I do not, therefore, speak with reference to you, but with a view to clear myself. I could not bear that you should, by possibility, conceive that my intentions were less honourable, than I am sure your conduct will be."

Mr. Bagshawe assured him that he was bound by no pledge to withhold any thing that he was now going to mention. He then stated that he had found great displeasure to exist against him in

the mind of Mr. Morton; and that the cause of this, was a belief that the execution of the writ had been an electioneering measure, timed by his direction, so as to trouble and defeat the opposite party; that the suing creditor was the brother-in-law of one of the Wichcombe burgesses, who was most warm in his opposition to Mr. Morton; and that a letter had been seen by Mr. Morton, which proved the existence of a plot against him, and Lacy's participation in it.

Mr. Bagshawe could not learn more than that such a letter existed. It was not in Mr. Morton's possession; and that gentleman would not tell to whom it had been written, or in whose hands he had seen it.

Lacy was astonished, and shocked to find himself considered guilty of so gross a piece of treachery. The circumstance of the letter also threw a more unpleasant light upon the subject, and seemed to indicate that his own character had been deliberately undermined. He knew that no letter existed which could, with any truth, tax him even with a previous knowledge of the execution which was hanging over Mr. Morton; and it was therefore evident, that the one alluded to had been prepared with a malicious intention.

How to clear himself was now the question.—He first thought of requiring from Mr. Morton a distinct statement of the charges against him, and the foundations on which they rested; but it occurred to him, that this demand might possibly be refused; and as a serious quarrel would then be the inevitable consequence, he resolved to dispense with this measure, until he had previously tried more cautious and less obtrusive methods of justification.

In the prosecution of these, we must now leave him, and direct our attention to other circumstances which were occurring in the mean time.

CHAPTER XIX.

Throughout the world, if it were sought,
Fayre words ynoughe a man shall fynde:
They be good chepe, they cost right nought,
Their substance, it is only wynde;
But well to say, and so to meane,
That swete accord is seldome sene.

SIR T. WYATT.

EASTER was now come. No amelioration appeared in the circumstances of the Mortons; and Agnes, who had hoped that time would render her parents more reconciled to their situation, was doomed in this to be disappointed. The first shock of their distress had made them indifferent to many minor points of comfort; and they had steeled themselves to the necessity of bearing even more than they had to endure, and secretly gloried in their petty heroism. But these feelings had subsided; they had leisure to review their wants, and contrast their present with their former life; and, day after day, they appeared more desirous to forget their poverty, and do as they were accustomed.

It was the task of Agnes to recal them to prudence and resignation; and a melancholy task it was, especially for one who, like her, had almost within her grasp the means of making their existence so much more endurable. She read in their countenances the belief of her power to assist them. She began to reproach herself for not having used sufficient exertions, and resolved to apply once more to Sackville. She had already been assured

by him, that to apply any part of her fortune to the payment of her father's debts, would be a violation of the wishes of her deceased aunt. But it did not, she thought, necessarily follow from thence that she was forbidden to administer to her parent's comfort; and she trusted that something out of the accumulating surplus income, over and above her yearly allowance, might be granted her for that purpose. In strict justice, to pay the debts would be a more honourable employment of the money, than to devote it to the pleasures of him who had contracted them; but it was not likely that Agnes, full of the griefs of her parents, should take this severe view of the case.

It was about a week before the dinner at the Bagshawes, that Agnes first made her application to Sackville. He heard her with an air of sincere interest, and professed to enter warmly into her feelings. He said that what she required was not impossible, but that there were difficulties which stood in the way of it. Such a measure required the concurrence of both the trustees; and however willing he himself might be to assist her, there was no prospect of Mr. Hawksworth agreeing to any thing of the kind. "But," said Sackville, "there are other means of obtaining what you require."

Agnes eagerly intreated him to adopt them.

"Most willingly," replied he, with a smile, "I shall want only your consent."

He paused for a moment, looked earnestly at her anxious countenance, approached nearer to her, and proceeded. "Your aunt, whose memory, I am sure, will ever be dear to both of us, provided in her will that the whole income of the fortune she left you, should pass into your hands, not simply on your arriving at the age of twenty-four, but even previously, in case of the occurrence of an

event, which I think I hardly need recal to your mind. It is your marriage, my dear Agnes, which will give you the fullest power of relieving the distresses of your parents. Then you will be at liberty to contribute more fully to their happiness; and I need not speak of the happiness which you will confer upon your fortunate husband, who, I am sure, will have a sincere pleasure in joining his humble endeavours to restore your father and Lady Louisa to the station which is their right.

There is only one person, to whom I cannot venture to say that this expedient would be acceptable or advantageous, and that is yourself. To the others I will not scruple to say, that your immediate marriage would be an inestimable benefit."

Agnes heard him with an agitation that was visible, chiefly, in her increasing paleness. Her eyes were fixed on the ground, and the expression of her countenance was melancholy and anxious.

"Mr. Sackville," said she, "I engaged last September to accept you, within the space of a year, and I received from you an assurance that no attempt should be made to hasten the period of our union, at least before the end of the next June. I had hoped that, on a point of such delicacy, this promise would have been strictly observed. I need not any longer ask you whether it has or not."

Sackville was startled by the unexpected tone of reproach in which her observation was conveyed. "Excuse me;" said he, "if I *were* asked, I should say that I had not broken the promise you mention. You appealed to me, as your trustee, upon a matter of business. You asked how you can most easily obtain the power of assisting your parents. I answer, by marrying. It is the simple truth, and I could in no respect, have answered otherwise, even if I were not the person who is destined to become your husband."

“I am not disposed to deny the truth of what you say, Mr. Sackville,” replied Agnes, coldly; “and I might be more obliged to you for the information, if it had been required. I knew the effect which my marriage would have upon the disposal of my fortune. I believed you to be perfectly conscious of my knowing it: and when you spoke of *other means*, I thought you were alluding to something *else*, of which I might possibly be ignorant. I asked you about the practicableness of a particular measure, and I have been answered by a description of the inflexible disposition of Mr. Hawksworth. If my request is neither impossible or improper, I will not think so ill of Mr. Hawksworth as to suppose that he cannot be induced to consent to it. At all events, the attempt shall be made. I may fail, and I shall then know how to think of other resources; but till then, I will not allow myself to be driven by a prospect of difficulties to take any other step.”

Sackville felt rather embarrassed by the firmness with which she spoke, and her apparent perception of his real designs; but he was too crafty and collected to allow his discomfiture to be apparent.

“I will be guided,” said he, mildly, “by your wishes: but why this displeasure? Suppose me even to have done the very worst you tax me with, to have urgently and directly pressed our immediate marriage, without any other plea than my own wishes, would this—*should* this—have been unpardonable? Should it even have been seriously considered an offence? It would be hard to accuse me of so much as a want of delicate attention; but never could it be said that I showed myself deficient in genuine attachment. It is one of the common errors of affection, my dear Agnes, to be inattentive to forms. It is true, I try to avoid this error. I know your disposition to

shrink from profession, and, in obedience to this, I endeavour to lose the lover in the friend, and to act as if I were never destined to be bound to you by any dearer ties than those by which I have been devoted to your service, through the will of your excellent aunt. But you must not suppose that, because I betray little, I necessarily feel little; and you will I hope excuse me, if the wish of my heart does sometimes escape, when any thing arises that is likely to promote it."

He regarded her with a look, which was meant to be that of love and admiration, but from which she shrunk with diffidence and dread. "Won't you say, that you forgive me, Agnes?" added he, taking her cold but unresisting hand. "A look, a smile—only a smile—and I shall be satisfied."

She did look up, and faintly smiled; but it was a smile, beneath which the countenance of Sackville fell in momentary confusion, and he shrunk from the silent language of her eye, for it conveyed to him the intelligence that she was not deceived, and had no faith in his professions of affection.

But his presence of mind and pliant powers of dissimulation soon enabled him to rally, and he was boldly proceeding in the same strain, with the hope of convincing her by his perseverance, when Agnes at length stopped him.

"I began," said she, "by talking to you on a subject of business. Let us return to it. It seems that the only obstacle to my request is the difficulty of obtaining Mr. Hawksworth's consent. I am glad to hear that this is all. I shall spare no pains to obtain it, and I trust I shall succeed. I will write to him immediately, and as you do not seem to object to the reasonableness of my request I hope it will be also supported by whatever you can urge in its favour."

Sackville promised his assistance, and pretended much eagerness to forward her project. It became his object to lull the suspicions of Agnes respecting his sincerity; and so dexterously did he pursue it, that, in spite of the unfavourableness of her impression, he eventually induced her to think that she had previously misconstrued his meaning, and been disposed to judge him too severely.

CHAPTER XX.

Deceit cannot otherwise be maintained than by deceit.

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

It was far from the intention of Sackville, that Agnes should succeed in her application to Mr. Hawksworth. Viewing her fortune, as that which was to become virtually his own, he was naturally averse to any expenditure which should check its present accumulation. He also dreaded the precedent which might be afforded by compliance, and the habit which Agnes might acquire of proferring assistance; and no less did he fear, that Mr. Morton might learn to look for it from that source, and, with such a prospect of support, relapse into his former habits of extravagance.

He had also fears respecting his engagement with Agnes. He knew that she was not attached to him, and had been driven into that engagement by the entreaties of her father, in order to save him from an exposure, which, after all, had not been averted. The only way in which her marriage could now be advantageous to her father, was by giving her an earlier power of assisting him; and this prospect, and the promise, were the only ties by which Sackville held her. The engagement of marriage was such as any disagreement might cause her to break. If, therefore, a present power of extending relief to her parents were to be given to Agnes, it was by no means impossible that pleas

might be found for the postponement of her marriage with him till the arrival of a fit period for asserting her independence.

Such were the results which Sackville apprehended from a compliance with the present request of Agnes; and attributing to her, like most artful people,, the same manœuvering disposition which he felt himself, he half suspected her of having in view, not so much the relief of her father, as her own eventual release from her engagement. He, therefore, resolved to frustrate her application at all hazards.

The character of Sackville's colleague was very favourable to the success of his plans. Mr. Hawksworth was a very honorable man, but weak and confiding, to a degree that rendered him an easy mark for imposition. He was timid and nervous, and fearful of acting in cases of emergency; and Sackville, when he wished to have entirely his own way, could paralyze his operations at pleasure, by a skilful display of the difficulties of a case. An awful feeling of responsibility weighed like lead upon his conscientious mind; and he was so beset with scruples, that he scarcely dared to do even what he believed to be right. He had a great respect for the abilities of Sackville, and was led, by his own goodness of heart, to think that the probity of his colleague was equal to his talents.

Sackville had accurately noted all the qualifications of Mr. Hawksworth for a safe and passive coadjutor, and had himself dictated his selection to Mrs. Denham. Availing himself too of the retired habits of Mr. Hawksworth, he had prevented Agnes and her family from having much acquaintance with him, and he consequently found it not difficult to attribute to him any sentiments he pleased. While rendering him a mere puppet,

entirely subservient to his will, he uniformly represented him to the Mortons as peculiarly intractable. The few traits of his character, which were allowed to appear, were ingeniously wrested for this purpose. His timid scrupulosity was construed into obstinacy, and a few antiquated notions were magnified into insurmountable prejudices. Thus it became easy for Sackville to plead the opposition of Mr. Hawksworth, as a cause of the rejection of any measure that he was himself unwilling to adopt.

Sackville entered with apparent zeal into Agnes's project of writing to Mr. Hawksworth, and he promised to support her application by a letter from himself, which letter she was to see. He brought it to her, and after she had read it, and expressed her approbation of its contents, it was sealed and directed in her presence. He then took charge of that, and of her letter, promising to send them at the same time. This promise was never performed. Both letters were suppressed; and, in the place of that which he had shown to Agnes, he sent, on that same, day, the following:

“MY DEAR SIR,

“During the two last days, I have had a good deal of conversation with our young charge, on the subject of her father's situation, and I am sorry to find, that she still entertains the same unfortunate wish, of which I before informed you relative to the application of money to his relief, out of the interest of her own fortune. There is, however, this difference in her present intentions that whereas they formerly extended to the wild idea of paying off Mr. Morton's debts, they are now confined to the more feasible plan of rendering his present situation rather more comfortable.

“I need not tell you that, in point of strict justice, her present intentions are much less defensible than her former ones. Undoubtedly not one farthing ought to be expended on superfluities, as long as any just debts remain unpaid. Agnes very naturally prefers the gratification of her parents, to satisfying the demands of their creditors; and when one considers her tender and pliant disposition, and the influence which her father has over her, one surely cannot wonder at it.

“But it is our duty, my dear Sir, unpleasant as it may be, to prevent her from sacrificing herself to an overstrained sense of filial devotion. We must not allow her to be preyed upon by the necessities of others, however nearly connected, and however anxious she may seem to assist them.

“As for the situation of Mr. Morton, if I must speak plainly on so delicate a subject, I cannot, I confess, see any sufficient call for additional expenditure. He cannot live splendidly, or receive much company, or indulge his natural taste for show; but he has every thing that is necessary for mere comfort, and this is all that, under present circumstances, he *ought* to require. If he seeks for more than this, and wishes to emerge from his retirement, and indulge in the pleasures of society, which I suspect to be the case, nothing less than a very considerable addition to his present allowance will be in any degree sufficient.

“Nor would the evil end here. One expense would lead to another. Demands upon us would increase and I fear nothing short of the whole of our young ward’s income would eventually satisfy them. With such demands we could not comply, and an altercation and quarrel would be the most probable consequence. I have always observed that when successive applications are to be expected, it is the safest to resist them *in limine*. After

the admission of a principle, it is very difficult to settle the question of degree, without giving offence. I need hardly remind you of the irritability of Mr. Morton's disposition, and the likelihood of offence being taken, and very seriously too.

"I rather think you will receive a letter soon from Miss Morton, upon the subject mentioned above. Should such be the case, and you think proper to write in return, it will be an accommodation to the Mortons if the letter is sent under cover to me. But perhaps you will allow me to suggest, that it would be better to take no immediate notice of the application. It is sometimes dangerous to communicate, on subjects like these, otherwise than personally. Letters are liable to be misinterpreted. Should you, however, prefer writing, the safer way (if you do not object to it) is to authorize, me by a letter, which, in case of emergency, I could show, to explain your sentiments to them. I have so long had the pleasure of acting with you, that I think there is no danger of any misconception arising between ourselves.

"In your last letter, you gave me hopes of seeing you soon in town. For my own sake I am selfish enough to wish it may be so—for yours, I ought to wish that it may not. London, which is always hateful to every one who knows the pleasures of the country, is now peculiarly disagreeable, just at the commencement of its summer turmoil. If the business on which you are coming does not absolutely require your own presence, and I can be of any use, pray tell me. I am afraid this unpleasant affair of the Mortons will tend to render your stay less agreeable. I fear you will be exposed to much solicitation, and the risk of a quarrel; but I will do all in my power to spare you as much as possible. I have not yet informed the Mortons of your intentions; and I think it will be

much pleasanter for you, if they have no previous knowledge of your arrival, that they may not be prepared for the attack. I shall, therefore, say nothing about it, and you of course will not write to them.

“With best wishes for your continuance in health, believe me, my dear Sir, ever most faithfully yours,

“EDWARD SACKVILLE.

“P. S. May I beg of you, to burn this letter? I am sure I may trust to your not committing me with the Mortons, by making any allusion to it when you meet them in town.”

We have seen that the letter written by Agnes was suppressed. She waited long for that answer which was never to arrive, and at length determined to write again. To this course she was insidiously urged by Sackville; and as he affected to enter zealously into her wishes, he was allowed to see what her letter contained. He did not endeavour to suppress it, but he wrote to Mr. Hawksworth by the same post, availing himself of his knowledge of what Agnes had stated, for the purpose of weakening its impression, and he requested that no immediate notice might be taken of it.

In addition to other motives, Sackville had some hope that, by tormenting Agnes with these difficulties and delays, he might at length induce her to forsake her project. But he did not calculate sufficiently upon her firmness of purpose; and was unpleasantly surprised, about a week after she had sent the second letter, by hearing her propose, as a last resource, to go down to Mr. Hawksworth's place, and confer with him in person. Her plan seemed to be maturely arranged; her parents did not disapprove; her brother would accompany her,

and Lord Malvern had offered her a travelling carriage for the purpose.

Sackville's varied powers of persuasion and attack were instantly put into requisition to combat this unforeseen and dangerous resolution. At first the smile of incredulity was tried, and the tone of playful banter; but they were met in the same manner; and then, at length, he was reminded that her object was too serious to admit of a defeat from the arms of ridicule. Graver objections were then stated: the singularity of the step, the punctilious prejudices of Mr. Hawksworth, the implied reflection on him for neglect of attention to her request, and the absence of sufficient delay to warrant such an extremity.

The discussion was adjourned to the following day, and then Sackville yielded his reluctant approbation on the plan, after entreating that she would defer her journey for a few days; and it was at length arranged that, unless she previously received an answer, Agnes should quit London, with her brother, on the ensuing Monday. The distance from London to Mr. Hawksworth's place, was sufficient to occupy two days; and Sackville begged that Agnes would do him the favour to make use of his house at Trentford, as a resting place, on the first night, both in going and returning.

This offer had been accepted by her father in her behalf, even before she had heard it herself; and she did not like to make an ungracious return to Sackville's courtesy by non-compliance.

CHAPTER XXI.

Can such things be,
And overcome us, like a summer cloud,
Without our special wonder?

Macbeth.

THE appointed day arrived, and Agnes and her brother quitted London. Late in the evening, they reached Trentford, which they found had, in pursuance of the attentive directions of Sackville, been carefully prepared for their reception. They left it again on the following morning, and about the close of that day; Agnes with a beating heart, found herself approaching the venerable mansion of Mr. Hawksworth. She felt that an important moment was almost present, that, uncertain of the issue, she was about to throw herself upon the compassion of one, with whom, strong as was his influence over her, she had but little personal acquaintance, and to encounter prejudices, which, as she had been told, would seldom yield, even to the persuasive powers of Sackville. She remembered the arguments by which he had sought to oppose her resolution, and almost bewailed her rashness, in having so hastily overruled them.

The shades of evening were closing in, and as she drove up to the door of the mansion, its melancholy and deserted air filled her, she knew not why, with ominous forebodings. The shutters were all closed, though it might still be called day-

light; no living being was to be seen or heard, and they waited in long suspense, after repeated ringing and knocking, before any notice seemed to be taken of their arrival. At length the creaking and rattling of bars, bolts, and locks were heard within. The time which these preparations occupied, showed very plainly the excessive care with which the entrance had been guarded, a care which, to the mind of Agnes, seemed unpleasantly characteristic of what she considered the morose, suspicious temper of the owner.

The door, at last, was cautiously opened, and the trusty guardian of this well-barred portal, appeared in the person of an old woman. The motive for these precautions, and the tardy compliance with the summons, were explained by her answer to the first question: and Agnes heard, with surprise, that Mr. Hawksworth had set out for London on the preceding morning.

Much as Agnes had dreaded the expected interview a few moments before, she felt considerable disappointment. The object of a long journey was completely frustrated; and she had incurred some anxiety, which she might otherwise have been spared: and though the meeting might perhaps take place under pleasanter auspices in London, this was but a slight consolation. It seemed singular to her that such a mistake should have occurred, and that not even Sackville was previously informed of Mr. Hawksworth's intentions; but she had been taught to view the latter as an eccentric man, and this accounted for all that was strange and unforeseen.

Fortunately for Sackville, she entertained no suspicion of the vile artifice, which he had employed. Previous to her quitting London, Sackville had been informed, by letter, of the precise day on which Mr. Hawksworth would set out on his journey. His opposition to the plan proposed by

Agnes was then softened, and he only entreated her to await the expected answer till a stated day, naming that which he knew would exactly cause her to miss the person whom she went to see. He believed his treachery to be safe from discovery, and he was urged to it by a sense of the importance of securing a first interview with Mr. Hawksworth, and not allowing him to be exposed to the fascinating persuasions of his young ward till he had been steeled and tutored by a sufficient store of cogent reasons.

Agnes felt some reluctance in remaining that night at Mr. Hawksworth's, an uninvited guest, in the absence of the owner; but the old portress, who, as she soon informed her, bore the dignity of housekeeper of the mansion, urged her to stay. The engaging countenance and manners of Agnes won her heart at first sight; and the knowledge of her being the rich young lady to whom her master was guardian, together with the opportunity of displaying the great extent of her discretionary power, quite counterbalanced all the additional trouble which the invitation would cost her.

The mansion was old and sombre, full within of dark oak pannels, and rambling passages, and possessed the honours of a haunted room. But the nerves of Agnes were not, by that fatality which always attended the heroines of the Radcliffe school, exposed to a trial of its terrors; and her brother, though he professed that he should "like the fun," was not permitted by the considerate housekeeper to rue the consequences of his presumption. No adventure offered itself; and the next morning under the cheerful auspices of a bright April sun, they set out from Mr. Hawksworth's, and arrived again that night at Trentford.

This return was not expected so soon, and seemed to give little satisfaction to one of the servants, a man who had lived several years with Mr. Sack-

ville, and in whom he always seemed to place rather more confidence than in the others.

Agnes found here a letter from Sackville. It informed her, of his having that instant discovered that Mr. Hawksworth would not be at his own house when she arrived there; expressed the utmost grief for the unnecessary trouble she was exposed to, and trusted that his letter might still be in time to save her from performing more than half of her intended journey. This he knew would not be the case, nor did he mean that it should. He wrote solely with the intention of removing any suspicion of treachery on his part, that might possibly have arisen in the mind of Agnes. We have mentioned, that her pure and candid mind had not admitted the idea of any such extent of villainous deceit. The letter, therefore, operated no change in her impressions, but merely confirmed her unsuspectingness.

There are states of the mind, in which we are peculiarly disposed to conjure up the most gloomy and dispirited views of our past and present situation. This was now the case with Agnes: the fatigue of three successive days of travelling, had perhaps tended, in no slight degree, to relax the usual elasticity of her spirits. But there was ample cause for gloom and despondency, even in the most plain and dispassionate view of the events which had happened, and were still likely to ensue. Bitterly did she regret what she now considered the too easy surrender of her affections to Lacy. It was true, he had almost explicitly declared his attachment; and there was something in his manner, at their last meeting, which indicated that he still felt it.

But how was this to be reconciled with his avowed engagement to Miss Hartley? That was a practical contradiction, before which the weight of his half-uttered protestations sunk into compara-

tive insignificance. She knew nothing of the circumstances which had led to that engagement; but she knew that it had been talked of before her acquaintance with Lacy began. Miss Hartley was probably the first and rightful possessor of his heart, and she herself was but reaping the punishment of an act of forgetful aggression.

Cruel, indeed, had been her lot. On her seemed to have descended the terrible denunciation of scripture; she had been "cursed even in her blessings." Her parents, from whom she should seek for comfort and protection, had been the cause of deep affliction: the innocent admission of a first attachment had been turned to poison; and her wealth had subjected her to a thralldom, of which a type may be found in the tyranny of Mezentius, who chained together the living and the dead.

"Would that my lot had been more humble!" she exclaimed, almost aloud in the solitude of her own apartment. "Oh, that I had not possessed this fatal wealth but for which, he to whom I am now plighted never would have sought me!" She wished at length to dismiss these thoughts and seek forgetfulness and repose; but in vain. The fever of her mind prevented her from sleeping, and she arose and looked out at the cold moonlight scene, which the view from the window afforded.

It was a bright, clear night. Only a few fleecy clouds floated in the sky, and from among them, the stars glimmered faintly, almost extinguished by the splendour of the moon, now high in the heavens, and near the full. Its white, cold, watery beams, that were shed over the landscape, deprived every object, however plainly visible, of its daylight tint, and gave to the whole the appearance of being slightly overspread with snow. The adjoining lake, one of the chief ornaments of the place, and the expanse of sky; objects that in the day were lightest, were now enveloped in the deep-

est gloom. All the solemnity of night seemed to be concentrated in them, and the rest was unnaturally brightened.

Though the forms remained the same, so great was the difference of hue, that Agnes could scarcely recognize the scene on which she had gazed before. All was still: not even the feathery summits of the loftiest trees could be seen to move, nor did the gentlest rustle meet the ear. If solitude is ever terrible, it is chiefly when accompanied with silence; and Agnes could scarcely avoid feeling in some degree appalled by its present solemnity. She was not more accessible to feelings of superstitious dread, than the boldest of her sex may sometimes be; yet she felt, she knew not why, an ominous chill of fear, and longed for an indication, however slight that some living thing was still waking as well as herself. The scream of the owl, or even the tick of the death-watch would have been almost music to her ear at that awful moment.

She listened; and at length a sound was heard, though so indistinctly, that at first she thought herself deceived. It seemed to come from below, but she hardly knew whether from within or out of the house. Once she plainly distinguished something like the creaking of a bar, and afterwards it seemed as if the sash of a window was gently raised. Then all was still as death; then a slight rustling sound was heard, and afterwards a repetition of the former, as if the window was being closed again; and then once more all was still. A terrible thought flashed across the mind of Agnes at this moment; that robbers were entering the house, and had probably, ere this effected their purpose. She stood for a few minutes, in a state of breathless alarm, screening herself from view, behind a corner of the window, listening intently, and straining her eyes to penetrate the shadowy recesses of the shrubbery below.

She had not looked long when she thought she saw something move, but was not certain, and imagined for an instant that fear might have made her senses deceitful. But it was not so; again she saw it, but knew not what the object was. She drew still farther back, and watched with a more intent anxiety. Presently, a figure, scarcely distinguishable from the surrounding objects but by the shadow which it cast, was seen to emerge from the bushes, and move gently from the house. It was a man of rather low stature, whose stealthy, cautious tread, showed that he wished to avoid observation. He looked frequently from side to side, and once, screening himself behind an evergreen, he turned round, and seemed to reconnoitre the windows; and, as far as she could judge by the direction of his head, he was particularly observing her's. She could not distinguish his features, which appeared to be concealed by crape. In an instant, he had turned away his head, moved onwards, and in a few seconds was out of sight.

Agnes remained long pondering in astonishment and dread on this singular apparition. One thing seemed evident to her, that this person, be he who he might, had clandestinely quitted the house; but whether he were one of the household, or a thief that had gained secret entrance, was more than she could decide. The more she thought, the more she inclined to the former opinion: she believed she had heard the window closed and fastened again, and this could only have been done by some assistant within.

This was a less terrifying impression, and she was glad to adopt it. She debated with herself for a while, whether she should alarm the household immediately, or wait till the morning; and irresolution and fear so far triumphed as to induce her, perhaps erroneously, to pursue the less prompt course, and defer her communication. She was

fatigued in mind and body; and, in spite of the alarm, caused by what she had witnessed, sleep at length surprised her, and the morning came before she next awoke.

At first, her recollection of the past circumstance was by no means clear, and she almost doubted whether the whole was not a dream. But by degrees the obscurity vanished, and the scene returned so vividly to her mind, when she stood at the spot from which she had seen the figure, and traced the course it had taken; and so many concomitant facts now rose to her remembrance, that she soon dismissed every particle of doubt, and gave immediate information of all that she had witnessed.

The intelligence was received with many demonstrations of surprise and dismay, and in some with a slight appearance of incredulity. The person which Agnes had seen was strictly affirmed not to be any of the household; and, indeed, she did not think that his figure bore any resemblance, though her judgment on this point must necessarily have been imperfect. On the other hand, if it was a robber (as was remarked by the confidential servant above alluded to,) and he had entered the house, he must have taken something away, and it was their first object to ascertain if any locks had been broken open, or if any thing was missing.—A careful search was instantly commenced, which ended in their coming to the conclusion that every thing appeared to remain precisely as it was the day before.

During this search, on the part of the household, Agnes recommended to her brother to look for the traces of feet in those parts of the shrubbery, where, according to the best of her recollection, the figure had appeared, and particularly under the window, which she had heard opened and shut. He did look, and found nothing. Agnes was sur-

prised, nay, almost inclined to waver in her belief as to the reality of what she had seen. A weaker mind might have been led to think that the figure was an unearthly visitant. In fact, the absence of traces might be accounted for by the circumstances of their having been a frost in the night, though it had begun to thaw towards daybreak.

Her brother, however, who had all along been rather incredulous, now lost all faith in the correctness of her story, upon finding it so utterly unsupported by any other circumstance. He believed it to be the result of a feverish imagination, or a dream, the impression of which had been so vivid as to seem like truth; and he laboured to persuade his sister, that if she had really seen what she described, she would have immediately given the alarm, instead of going quietly to sleep, and such is the imperfection of our senses, and our want of reliance on them, that Agnes was almost disposed to subscribe to his opinion.

One slight circumstance only, which appeared upon re-examination of the room the window of which was supposed to have been opened, tended to confirm her previous impressions; it was nothing more than a drop of oil upon the floor, near one of the windows. A closer examination showed that oil had been applied to the hinges of the shutters, and various parts of this window, and it was easy to conceive that it was done with a view of lessening the noise of opening and closing. There were two other windows in the room, neither of which bore the same appearance. The room was one which Sackville used as a sitting-room, and in which he generally transacted business. It was the room in which he showed to Allen his forgery, and the documents which confirmed it. There were in it a large library-table furnished with drawers, and a bureau, all locked, and believed to contain papers and articles of value.

Agnes was anxious to return to London, and quitted Trentford that morning without any additional circumstances having transpired which tended to throw a light upon this mysterious affair.— While changing horses at the solitary inn of a small town, about fifty miles from Trentford, a person came up to the carriage, and taking off his hat civilly inquired whether he was not speaking to Miss Morton, and informed her that his name was Allen. The information was needless, as she knew him by sight. His object in addressing her appeared to be no other than to make inquiries after Mr. Morton, who, he said, he was sorry to hear had been very unwell. Agnes assured him that the report he had received must have been exaggerated; and, after another observation or two, he again bowed and walked away.

This was the only face she knew that met her eye in her way to London; and, without any incident of the slightest moment, she again returned to the humble and melancholy dwelling of her parents.

CHAPTER XXII.

Flat burglary as ever was committed.

Much ado about Nothing.

ON the following day, at an early hour, Sackville presented himself to the Mortons. To Agnes he was full of condolence and regret upon the fruitlessness of her journey, and the arrival of his own letter too late to be of use. Agnes, in return, had much to say to him, and among other things, related all that had passed at Trentford.

Sackville heard her tale, at first, merely as an amusing incident, and seemed prepared to treat it lightly; but, as she proceeded, his attention became more deeply fixed. He looked grave, and at length, changed colour, and ended with declaring that he entertained little doubt of his having been robbed. He even begged her to recapitulate all the circumstances, and in the presence of her father committed the whole to paper. His manner showed that the facts she mentioned appeared to him of the most serious import; and such was his eagerness to satisfy his doubts that he set out immediately from London, and arrived at Trentford that night.

It was very late when he reached it, but before he slept he commenced his examination. He began with his own sitting-room, out of which the person was supposed to have escaped. All that had been locked remained so still, and therefore the theft, if such there were, must have been com-

mitted by means of false keys. He knew that there was much to lose, and his hand trembled with anxiety as he turned the first lock. His anxious eye soon fell upon some money, which he remembered to have left in the drawer which he first opened: he counted it, and it was still the same: he then looked for other valuables, and he found them all untouched. He directed his attention in turn to every object that could be supposed to excite the cupidity of a robber, but all remained where he had left them; and, after a long and anxious search, he closed his eyes that night, without having been able to discover that he had suffered the slightest loss.

He arose next morning, well pleased with the result of his investigation, and only vexed at having been rendered uneasy, and led to undertake a journey by an idle tale, perhaps the fabrication of a feverish fancy, and which had been proved to end in nothing. He was, however, struck by the singular retribution which caused him to receive at the hands of Agnes the punishment of an anxious and unnecessary journey, in return for that to which he had exposed her. After all, was it a hoax? Was it done for the sake of tormenting him, or of getting him out of the way during their first interview with Mr. Hawksworth?

This was a very improbable course for Agnes to adopt; but, in conformity with the proneness of artful people to suspect others, strange and unworthy as the idea was, Sackville, for a moment, entertained it. He determined, however, before he went away to investigate a little farther, and again opened the bureau which stood in his own sitting-room. Suddenly a fearful thought flashed across his mind: he knew not why it occurred at that moment, or why it had never struck him before; but it made his countenance turn alternately red and

pale with agitation. A search was then commenced among his papers, and was continued for several minutes. Exclamations of apprehension and trouble frequently escaped him, till at length there was a dead pause, and he sat for some time motionless. It seemed as if his worst fears were realised; and, after the stupor of surprise his feelings burst forth into passionate exclamations of mingled anger and despair.

The instrument of his control over Allen, the forged paper, with its accompanying documents, could no longer be found. Every thing else appeared to remain precisely in its former place.—Nothing was even disarranged; and but for the intimation which he had received from Agnes, months, years, might have elapsed before he had become sensible of his loss. The removal of these important papers could, of course, be attributed to no other person than Allen; but it was difficult to believe that he had committed so daring a crime without the assistance of some person belonging to the house. The probability of domestic treachery tended to embitter the loss to Sackville, more especially as his suspicions fell upon the servant in whom he had hitherto reposed most confidence.

Another aggravating recollection arose to his mind. It was, that he himself was in some degree the cause of that which had happened. If he had not complied with Allen's request to be allowed to see the forged paper, that person would never have known where it might be found. How incautious had he been to restore the paper in Allen's presence to its former place, and to allow it to remain there! But he had never contemplated the probability of such a bold extent of villany.

"I was a fool," he bitterly exclaimed, "to tamper with crime, and not to be prepared for the worst that might ensue; to admit a felon to my

confidence, and trust to his forbearance. I knew that the man was crafty and unscrupulous, but I undervalued his resolution." He then remembered how on the occasion of showing the paper, he vainly flattered himself to have obtained a signal triumph over the poor trembling tool of his villainies; but now the crafty wretch had triumphed in his turn, and the able and artful Sackville seemed to shrink to a humble tyro, in cunning and audacity, compared with the mean and half-educated man whom he had once moulded to his will. He felt degraded in his own eyes by having been thus outwitted, and vowed revenge on his insidious aggressor.

But this revenge was not easily to be obtained. There were many difficulties in the way of legal redress. He was fully persuaded that the lost papers could have been taken by no other than Allen, but his presumptive evidence was not of that kind which would be satisfactory in a court of justice. No pecuniary value could be assigned to the papers, nor would it even be possible to prove that such had ever existed. Allen, if brought to trial, would probably defend himself by denying all knowledge of them, and declaring the whole to be a malicious fiction; and Sackville knew not how he should reply. He might lay open a full account of the whole of the transaction which had passed between them; but how disgraceful would that exposure be to himself! He should even be obliged to confess himself guilty of a misprision of felony, and his character would be irrevocably blasted. He should be obliged to declare upon a trial that no money or other valuable property had been touched, not even that which had been deposited in the same place with the lost papers; and this circumstance would throw over the proceedings a suspicion, which would be almost fatal to his cause.

Such were the difficulties which would present themselves even in the case of his having a reasonable probability of being able to attach the act of burglary to Allen. But this was found to be far from an easy task; and the exertions which Sackville made to trace his progress on the day preceding and following the robbery, were utterly unsuccessful. He recollected having heard from Agnes, in the course of conversation, that she saw him on the following day at a place fifty miles from Trentford, and though the "alibi" was not conclusive, it was strongly in Allen's favour. Sackville made diligent inquiries at this place respecting Allen but could gain no information, except from one person who had rather a confused recollection of a man, corresponding to the description, having come to the inn on foot.

Sackville, therefore, dismissed all hope of bringing the delinquent to justice; and his revengeful feelings were compelled to satisfy themselves with the prospect of secretly blasting the character of the man on whom he could no longer calculate as a submissive tool, and whom he could not, with safety, openly attack.

Little doubt will probably be entertained by our readers of the guilt of Allen; but they may, nevertheless, think it more satisfactory to be presented with an explicit statement of the truth. The person whom Agnes saw was Allen. Ever since his discovery of the situation in which the forged paper was kept, he had resolutely determined to destroy it. The atrocious project of burning down the whole house once occurred to his guilty mind; but it was abandoned for the safer plan which he afterwards carried into execution. His first step was to obtain, by means of a considerable bribe the assistance of that servant, to whom we have before alluded, as one in whom Sackville reposed

peculiar confidence. This man, as the event showed, was utterly unworthy of that confidence: but it is the common fate of rich and powerful villainy to fall a victim to the humble instruments by whose aid it seeks to advance itself.

From this servant Allen obtained impressions in wax of Sackville's keys, and procured false keys to be made. Next, it was necessary that Allen should be clandestinely admitted, this servant being the only person intrusted with the secret.—The time had been settled without any expectation of Agnes and her brother being then at Trentford, and after their unforeseen return there was no opportunity for further concert. At midnight Allen was introduced into the house, unlocked the bureau, and after a long and careful search, found, and carried off, his own forgery and the attesting documents.

Every precaution had been taken to ensure his silent and secret escape. The situation of the room occupied by Agnes was, however, unfavourable, and in fixing his eyes upon the window, he faintly perceived her figure receding from it, as if she had observed him. This caused in him no slight alarm, for he foresaw all the consequences to which her observation might lead, and even dreaded an immediate pursuit. But fertile in resources, he resolved to turn this apparent danger into an advantage, and knowing the direction in which she would travel, he rode all night till he had reached a considerable distance from Trentford, and leaving his horse a few miles from the place where he afterwards accosted her, walked thither, and awaited her coming.

Thus providing for the worst that could ensue, an eventual trial, he should be able to convert the principal witness against him into the most effectual means of his defence.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A wise man endeavours, by considering all circumstances, to make conjectures and form conclusions: but the smallest accident intervening (and in the course of affairs it is impossible to foresee all) does often produce such turns and changes, that at last he is just as much in doubt of events as the most ignorant and inexperienced person.

SWIFT.

SACKVILLE, on his way back to London, anxiously reflected on the policy which it was advisable to adopt in speaking to the Mortons of his loss; and as he could not describe the nature of it, he thought it was better to treat it lightly. He, therefore, told them that the only things missing were a few papers, which he himself had probably mislaid, but that nothing was gone that any thief was likely to take. He seemed perfectly unruffled; and smiled when he spoke of the supposed robber, as if he doubted whether the senses of Agnes had not deceived her, though politeness withheld him from plainly expressing that opinion.

Much as he longed to take his meditated revenge, by secret accusations of Allen, he felt that prudence dictated forbearance; and that it was necessary to disentangle himself from all connection with the instrument of his villainies, or place himself beyond the reach of his retaliation, before he attempted to crush him.

Independent of the serious discovery which Sackville had made at Trentford, he found much cause to regret his absence from London. Three days

had materially altered the aspect of affairs between the Mortons and Mr. Hawksworth, and brought them to a state of mutual good understanding, very detrimental to the views of Sackville, and which, had he been in town, he would have laboured to prevent. As Sackville's evil stars would have it, Mr. Morton, wishing, very naturally, to show all possible attention to the guardian of his daughter, had called upon Mr. Hawksworth, and invited him to dine with them that same day. The entertainment to be sure was such as Mr. Morton would once have shuddered at the bare thought of either giving or receiving; but Mr. Hawksworth, as his invitor expected, was not fastidious upon these points.

The result of that evening was, the removal of many erroneous impressions from the minds of each party. Mr. Hawksworth found, in Mr. Morton, a very gentlemanly man, of mild and engaging manners; and he was delighted with Agnes, and perfectly well pleased with the languid good humour of Lady Louisa.

The Mortons, on their part, found Mr. Hawksworth by no means the strange, bigotted, intractable person which he had been represented to them. He seemed a shy, quiet, good-natured, elderly man, full of old-fashioned ceremonious politeness, and rather slow in his ideas, and elaborate in his phraseology; naturally nervous, strongly impressed, through the timidity of his character, with a fear of committing himself, or of giving offence, but, at the same time, candid and benevolent.

Mr. Hawksworth did not find himself assailed by those solicitations which Sackville had caused him to dread. The ill-timed journey undertaken by Agnes, was necessarily mentioned; but during the whole of the first day, no allusion was made to the object of it, and it was not till he himself called

upon the Mortons the following morning, that Agnes, who requested a short and private conference, then introduced her application. To the surprise of Agnes, she then found that Mr. Hawksworth was by no means so rigid and inflexible in his notions as she was prepared to expect. He did not seem very unfavourable to her request, nor had much to urge in opposition to it. He seemed only timid in the execution of his office; talked much of his responsibility, and the necessity of mature consideration, long pompous words, which he often repeated; and was evidently afraid of doing any thing without the entire concurrence of Sackville. Nevertheless, urged by a sincere desire to gratify, as far as was consistent with his duty, the wishes of Agnes, he at length declared, that if not opposed by the opinion of his colleague, he should be happy, for his own part, to accede to her request.

He was not a little surprised to learn, that Sackville had delivered precisely the same sentiments; and he could hardly reconcile the circumstance with a perfect fairness of proceeding. However, this assurance, coming as it did from the lips of Agnes, quite disarmed Mr. Hawksworth of all his intended severity of opposition; and Sackville, on his arrival, found, to his dismay, that the negotiation was in such a train that there remained but little hope of frustrating its fulfilment. He came to this conclusion, after two separate conversations with Agnes and with Mr. Hawksworth, in which he was obliged to exercise his ingenuity in qualifying and unsaying a good deal that he had said before.

Having once resolved to permit the request of Agnes to be granted he took care to appropriate the greatest share of credit to himself, and to appear to lead rather than to follow; and he entered with such apparent zeal into the furtherance of her

wishes and seemed so sincerely happy in the prospect of their fulfilment, that Agnes felt, for a moment, as if she could almost learn to love him.

“And now that we have gained our point,” said he, to Agnes, with his most engaging smile, “there is a project which I mean to propose to your father and Lady Louisa, and which I think will be for their benefit, and comfort, and which I hope they will approve of. No, no,” he added, seeing her blush, and look alarmed, “it is not the object which I have most at heart; it is calculated for their good rather than for ours—or *mine*, I believe I ought to say.”

This project was that the Mortons should make use of the money to be advanced to them out of the accumulated interest of their daughter's fortune for the last three years, for the purpose of enabling them to go abroad. Sackville urged this measure with all the force of his persuasive eloquence; and he painted so well its numerous advantages and pleasures, the benefit to be expected to their health and spirits, and the easy rate at which comparative luxuries might be obtained in foreign countries, that it was soon unanimously voted; and it was finally decided, that it should be carried into execution, if possible, in the course of a month. Sackville would fain have induced them to name an earlier time; but Lady Louisa had an insuperable objection to crossing the sea before the spring gales had quite subsided, and could not have made up her mind to so serious a step with less time for preparation.

We have seen that the plans of Sackville have undergone a sudden change, and it will be necessary to detail the motives by which he was actuated. One of them was his jealousy of Lacy, and his consequent wish to remove Agnes from the possibility of meeting him. He feared, with rea-

son, that her attachment for him was not quite extinct, and was made uneasy even by the slight circumstance of her having dined in his company at the Bagshawes. He also felt that he had lost his former hold upon Allen, and could not stifle an indistinct apprehension, that some of his nefarious transactions with that person might, by some means or other, come to the knowledge of the Mortons. But if he could once carry the Mortons abroad, this danger would almost cease.

Such were some of the considerations which led to his sudden proposal of a removal to the Continent.

CHAPTER XXIV.

 Their great guilt,
Like poison given to work a great time after,
Now 'gins to bite the spirits.

Tempest.

It was not without reason that Sackville reflected with dismay on the cessation of his former means of influence over Allen. It could not be doubted that a person who had adopted such vigorous measures to effect his independence, would avail himself of it to the utmost; and even if Sackville could have any hopes of employing his offices for the future, it must be by dint of bribery, rather than of compulsion. Besides, he knew that the tables were turned, and that instead of Allen being in his power, he himself was now in Allen's. He knew that the latter had in his possession, letters and papers relative to some of their late infamous transactions; and it was not impossible that cupidity or revenge might lead him at some time or other, to make an unfriendly use of them. It was, therefore, of the first importance to Sackville, to get them out of Allen's hands.

It was known to Sackville that Allen was to come up to town shortly, for the purpose of being examined before a committee upon a projected railway. He accordingly wrote to him, employing the most gracious and friendly terms, wishing suc-

cess to the business in behalf of which he was engaged, proffered his own good offices, and then concluded a letter of more specious profession than he generally thought necessary to use towards his inferiors, by requesting that Allen would bring to London, and deliver to him, certain letters and papers, which he then specified. In a few days, he received an answer from Allen, stating, that if the above-mentioned letters and papers could be found, they should be brought.

Allen at length arrived in London, and Sackville sent to him to request a conference. He obeyed the summons, and the confederates once more met. There was no change in Allen's manner. It was civil and submissive as before. Sackville also tried to behave the same as usual; but, in spite of himself, an inward sense of insecurity induced him to soften his former tone of command, and blend with it more of courtesy and persuasion.

"Well, my good friend," said he to Allen, after talking for a while on subjects of minor importance, "I know you are a man of your word, and therefore, I need hardly ask whether you have brought those letters which I wrote to you about."

"I have, Sir," replied Allen, drily.

"Quite right—many thanks to you; and you have got them here?" pursued Sackville, endeavouring to repress all appearance of the eagerness which he really felt.

"No, Sir," returned the other, in the same quiet tone. "I have not brought them with me now."

"Indeed! well—it does not much signify. You can bring them to me to-morrow."

Allen returned no immediate answer, but cast

his eyes on the ground, with an air of mystery and reluctance.

"Where is the difficulty?" said Sackville, with impatience.

"Difficulty?—Oh, none, I hope, Sir; I dare say we shall soon come to a proper arrangement;" then, after another pause, he added drily, "A man, Sir, must live."

"Is that a new discovery of yours?" replied Sackville, with a laugh. "The observation is true enough; but I don't exactly see the drift of it. Pray what does it mean?"

"It means just this, Sir; that I have exposed myself to a good deal of risk and inconvenience on your account, in all these affairs, not to mention the trouble, which was no trifle; and I hope, Sir, that if I am to give you up the letters and papers that you wrote about, you will not object, in return, to make me a handsome consideration."

"What do you call a handsome consideration?"

"Oh, Sir," replied Allen: with affected moderation, "I don't presume to dictate to you: I leave it to your generosity."

"My generosity declines answering. I must insist upon your telling me what you expect."

Allen hesitated, and turned away for a moment, as if in the act of calculating. "I am sorry, Sir," said he, after a short period of silence, "that you will force me to name the terms myself, for I don't like to seem encroaching and exorbitant; but, if I must speak, I will tell you at once, honestly and plainly, that I think, the least I ought to take, is five thousand pounds."

Sackville received this announcement with a mingled expression of astonishment and rage, and his

colour rose as he indignantly surveyed the associate of his villainies.

“Excellent!” he replied: “this almost exceeds belief. And do you pretend to say, that unless I comply with this modest request, you shall withhold the papers I asked for?”

“I certainly shall,” replied Allen firmly.

“Very well,” pursued the other, “then I shall know what course to take. Hark you, Sir, when I asked you to name your demand, it was without the slightest intention of complying with it, even had the sum been trifling compared with that which you have mentioned. You have no right to make any stipulation; and I shall steadily resist such an aggression.

“I am sorry for it, for the sake of both of us,” replied Allen, coolly.

There was a threat implied in this speech, which stung Sackville to the quick; and his rage at being thus rebelled against by the hitherto submissive instrument of his will, was almost too great for concealment. But prudence warned him that he had a difficult part to play, and he paused for reflection, before he ventured to reply.

“Allen,” he answered, fixing upon him a penetrating glance of scrutiny, “this language is new. You seem to have forgotten, all at once, the tremendous punishment which hangs over you, and which my hand can let fall. You now talk as if you were at liberty to stipulate, upon more than equal terms, and as if my power had ceased; and I ask you, Sir, the reason of this change;” and Sackville, as he uttered this ensnaring question, again fixed his eyes upon Allen, as if he would read his very thoughts.

Allen bore this terrible scrutiny with a compo-

sure that surprised his querist. He was perfectly unabashed, and seemed even indifferent. He was amply endowed with that presence of mind, and command of countenance, which serve to constitute what may be called civil courage. Perhaps he would not, with such firmness, have met the eye of an honest man; but his knowledge of Sackville's character blunted the efficacy of the attack. It was but the encounter of artifice with artifice, of guilt with guilt. It was a mere trial of boldness and address, in which the secret stings of an evil conscience had no power to operate.

“Mr. Sackville,” said Allen, calmly, “I have no objection to tell you my reasons, for I wish to be open in my dealing with *you*. I know, Sir, that you have in your possession evidence against me, which, if you chose to make use of it, might ruin me for ever. But, Sir, I have been considering the subject, and I don't think that you will ever choose to make use of it in that way. I am a plain, simple man, Sir, and no lawyer; but I know that there is such an offence as misprision of felony; and I know, that in case of a trial, even though you did bring me to justice, it could not be very easy for you to clear yourself of that offence in the opinion of the public; and I think, Sir, that it would be in my power, to let out such a history of all our transactions, as would go near to make you fly the country. I don't say that you would suffer any thing from the law; but you would certainly lose your character; and a character is of too much consequence to a gentleman in your situation, for you to run the risk of injuring it, merely for the sake of punishing a poor man like me, even though I had offended you ever so much. On this account, Sir, I don't think that you will ever bring me to trial for the forgery, and I have

determined to brave the consequences of resisting your orders.

There was something in the dogged business-like calmness of this defiance, which made it as formidable as it was annoying. At the same time, there was a studied ingenuity in the assignment of the motives of Allen's present conduct, which brought fresh evidence to Sackville's mind, that Allen was guilty of the removal of the forged paper. How to reply to him was a difficult question. Fraud and flattery would be equally unavailing, and would tend to raise the demands of his antagonist, by a tacit confession of weakness. To persuade, was hopeless; it was better if possible to bully. Allen was probably ignorant of the extent of Sackville's information, and a sudden announcement of it, might perhaps awe him into submission.

"Allen," said the latter, "your reasons do credit to your ingenuity; but they are not the real ones. I know them and will tell them"—then after a pause, calculated to give effect to his words, he added in a tone of impressive solemnity, "I accuse you of having, on the morning of the sixteenth, a little after midnight, burglariously entered my house at Trentford, and stolen from thence the forged paper, which I had in my possession. This I know, and from evidence of the strongest kind. That evidence I shall not detail; but you may have reason to rue its accuracy, if you persist in your present opposition to my wishes."

Allen received this terrible accusation with an air of evident confusion; but it was the confusion of astonishment, rather than of guilt, and was scarcely more than might have been evinced, under such circumstances, by an innocent person. When he first spoke, it was to request, with an

admirable look of bewilderment, that Mr. Sackville would do him the favour to repeat what he had just said.

"I cannot understand you, Sir," said he, when he had heard it a second time, "I cannot for the life of me. It is no joking matter, and yet I can hardly think you in earnest. I ask you, Sir, do you seriously believe me to have stolen the paper?"

"I do," replied Sackville, sternly.

"Very well—then I am to understand that the paper is missing?"

Sackville was silent.

"Silence gives consent," resumed the other, with a coarse smile. "This is good news for me—I am free—and now, Sir, we no longer stand upon the same terms as formerly."

"Perhaps not," resumed Sackville, "but they are little changed for your advantage. Your character is still in my power, and probably your life."

"My life is as safe as yours, Sir; and as for my character—you say it is in your power—yes, and your character is in mine: but upon that point the sooner we come to an understanding the better. To say that you can ruin my character is all very fine between ourselves; but I would not advise you to try. If you are wise, you will not accuse me of this cock-and-bull robbery of the paper you have lost—no; nor of the old business of the forgery. Say nothing you cannot support, or you shall find what it is to meddle with people's reputations. I know that the law can give me redress, and the law shall—and if you were to speak against me, I would bring my action for defamation, as soon as look at you. As for your trial, and your proofs, and your evidence of a robbery that never existed, I laugh at them, Sir; I laugh at them.

It is easy enough to spread slander, but it is not so easy, in a court of justice, to substantiate a lie. Besides, supposing, for argument's sake, that I had actually committed the robbery you talk of, I should like to know, Sir, how you would indict me? What is the value of the forged paper? How would you describe it? How will you account for your possession of such a paper? and who will you bring to swear that it ever existed? And supposing (which is very improbable) that you could succeed in convicting me, how would your character bear my true account of all the transactions that have passed between us! No, Sir, silence would be your safest course, even if I *had* stolen the paper, and would confess it here before a witness. And now, as for the forgery, Sir, of which I do confess myself guilty; as you seem to have lost the only proof, let me advise you never to mention it. I cannot suffer attacks upon my character. It stands very clear with the world at large, and I am determined to keep it so. Therefore, Sir, take notice—if I ever find, that you have even so much as hinted what you know of that affair, I shall think it a duty—a duty which I owe to myself, and my family, to defend myself by bringing an action against you. You need not look so angry, Sir. I speak for your sake as much as for my own; for if you should be so imprudent as to talk, I dare say the law will allow me to redress myself, pretty handsomely, at your expense.”

“Admirable!” exclaimed Sackville, goaded beyond the bounds of forbearance. “And have you the effrontery to say this to *me*?—me, who have seen you so long in your true colours, and know what a poor, mean, shuffling scoundrel you are? and to threaten *me* with the consequences of speaking the *truth*! I thought I had known you; but

this pitch of impudence exceeds all I could have believed."

"Now, Sir, you talk like a gentleman," said Allen, with the most insulting composure. "I could stand for an hour and listen to you. I am not in any hurry, Sir; you may go on abusing me."

There was something in the calm derision of Allen's words and manner, more insupportably galling to Sackville, than the utmost vehemence of invective could have been. Though endued with strong powers of self command, he could not control the expression of his rage.

"Leave the house," said he, "infernal villain!" and scarcely could he restrain his hands from an act of violence.

But nothing could ruffle the composure of Allen. "We are alone, Sir," said he with a sneer, as he coolly smoothed the brim of his hat, "and calling names is mere child's play; but when you speak to me next, Mr. Sackville, say something actionable before witnesses, and I shall be obliged to you. Good day, Sir;" and once more surveying Sackville from head to foot, with a smile of defiance, he turned round, and left the room.

Never yet had Sackville experienced feelings so bitter as those which this interview had excited. He had been thwarted, defied, insulted, by the man whose words and actions were lately subservient to his will, and who could scarcely be said to live but by his permission. He had been proved inferior in address, in confidence, and in temper, to one who was greatly below him in station, and in all those mental acquirements, of which Sackville had most reason to be proud. But he had stooped from his height to be this man's associate in guilt. and he felt, too late, that guilt had levelled all dis-

tinctions. He felt too that all those endowments which would have aided his advancement in a worthier career, now redounded to his disadvantage. They were but clogs that impeded his descent into those miry paths, of villainy which he had demeaned himself to tread.

Bad as he was, he had still some gentlemanly scruples, some faint feeling of honour, which tended only to weaken him in the conflict with one who had none; and he found at length, that he was contending with a wretch, who like the unjust steward in the parable, was "wiser in his generation."

These thoughts occurred to Sackville, and raging, in his bosom, formed "the proper hell" of baffled wickedness.

When his anger cooled, he had also to accuse himself of folly, in having allowed Allen to depart, without having again endeavoured to treat for the delivery of the letters. His plan of terrifying him into submission had evidently failed, and it was, therefore, necessary to have recourse to gentler methods. It, however, appeared to Sackville, upon more mature consideration, that such methods could be tried with a greater prospect of success in the course of another interview, and that in the mean while his threats might have had more effect than Allen was willing to admit.

In this conjecture, Sackville was right. Allen was not so regardless of Sackville's threats to bring him to trial for the burglary at Trentford, as he affected to be. He did not know that Sackville might not be in possession of powerful evidence, or even that a confession might not have been extorted from his accomplice; but he knew that, at all events, there was nothing to be gained, and much to be hazarded—by immediate submission or even by an appearance of irresolution and fear.

The soundest policy urged him to assume the attitude of innocence and security. This, if Sackville's threats were destitute of foundation, would enable him to persevere in his exorbitant demands; if not, and danger was really to be feared, it would be equally easy to conciliate Sackville at a more advanced stage of the business.

CHAPTER XXV.

Which is the villain?—let me see his eyes,
Than when I note another man like him,
I may avoid him.

Much ado about Nothing.

AFTER watching the struggles and broodings of guilt, we will now turn to the more agreeable contemplation, of the steps pursued by Lacy for vindicating his injured honour. He had now learned that Mr. Morton suspected him of having behaved with the basest treachery—of having, at the time of his frank and friendly declaration on the hustings, secretly participated in a plot, which was to secure him the election, by plunging his opponent into ruin and disgrace. He did Mr. Morton the justice to believe, that these injurious suspicions had not been gratuitously assumed. He believed them to have been suggested by others; and it was now his task to unravel the tissue of misrepresentations by which those suggestions had been conveyed. He preferred, for the prudential reasons which we have mentioned above, to effect his justification without communicating with Mr. Morton, but to prove the absence of all collusion from the confessions of those by whom the legal process had been conducted.

In this investigation he was favoured by acci-

dent. He had been applied to, by a person of the name of Wilkinson, for his recommendation and assistance in procuring an office then vacant in the county. The applicant hinted in his letter, which was worded rather obscurely, that this request, if granted, would not be the first obligation he had received; but hoped, that he should not be considered altogether an undeserving object. To this Lacy replied by professing his ignorance of any other favour that he had conferred, or cause that existed for it—declining to recommend without a knowledge of the qualification of the parties, and declaring that, *cæteris paribus*, he must support the application of another person.

It was soon after the despatch of this answer, that Lacy left London for Wichcombe. One of his objects, when in that neighbourhood, was to see the attorney employed against Mr. Morton, and the creditor who sued him for debt, and to discover if they had any knowledge of the existence of such an injurious opinion as Mr. Morton seemed to entertain. A short inquiry soon informed him that the creditor of Mr. Morton, and the man of the name of Wilkinson, who had lately written to him, were one and the same person. Wilkinson lived at no great distance from Wichcombe, and no sooner had he heard of Lacy's arrival in that town, than he came over to see him, full of indignation at the unfavourable manner in which his application had been met.

“I am not a Wichcombe voter, Sir,” said the man; “but I think I deserve some encouragement, for all that; for I can make bold to say that I have done you a good turn, and at the last election too.”

“Explain yourself,” said Lacy.

“Oh, there is no need of that: you know well

enough, Sir, that I was the person who sent the bailiffs to Dodswell, and made Mr. Morton give up the contest."

"I know it *now*," said Lacy.

The man smiled at the implied denial of having known it before.

"Even if that circumstance had gained me the election," pursued Lacy, "which it did not, for I was at the head of the poll before it occurred, I should be very sorry that it should be considered any reason for my favouring or assisting you."

"Oh, certainly, Sir,—" replied the man, with an odd look of intelligence, "it need not be *considered* so; but you know it *is* a reason between ourselves."

"No," said Lacy, rather indignantly, "I deny that, with me, it either is or will be so."

Wilkinson again smiled, and was silent. Lacy was struck with his manner, and determined not to neglect so fair an opportunity of pursuing his intended inquiry. "You seem," said he, to Wilkinson, "not to believe me. You seem to think, I know not why, that a secret understanding exists between us; your letter conveyed that impression, and your words and manner express the same; this is to me a mystery, and I wish to break through it: speak out, plainly and boldly, and let us have done with hints and inuendos."

Wilkinson looked puzzled. "Oh, very well, Sir—as for that—I can have no objection to speak out plainly and boldly to you; I only thought you did not wish it."

"And why so?"

"Because, Sir, you know very well that you don't like to *seem* to know any thing about the matter."

"About what matter?"

“Lord! Sir!—why, begging your pardon, what can be the use of keeping up these sort of pretences among ourselves?—as if we did not both of us know that you were at the bottom of my proceedings against Mr. Morton!”

Lacy's astonishment at this intimation was extreme. He knew that gross deceit must have existed in some quarter, but he had no suspicion of its having been employed upon the suing creditor himself. The investigation which followed brought to light much of the scandalous arts which had been used to deceive him. It appeared that he had been urged, partly by anonymous letters, partly by the actual intervention of Allen, so to arrange the execution of the writ as to distress Mr. Morton in the midst of the election. This being done, he was informed by Allen, that he had conferred a favour upon Mr. Lacy, which would not soon be forgotten; that the plan had his approbation and that he was the writer of the anonymous letters. At the same time, Wilkinson was informed, that Mr. Lacy was one of those affectedly squeamish persons who, though very willing to profit by the misdeeds of others, are loth to admit their concurrence in them, or even their foreknowledge and tacit approbation. He was therefore warned that he would give serious offence, and forfeit the support of Mr. Lacy, if he ever wounded his delicacy by alluding to the part which he bore in the transaction, or even to his own services. He was assured that he would reap the profit of this courtly forbearance, and would gain nothing by the opposite course.

The former assurance seemed soon to be verified. Wilkinson wished to obtain for his son a place in the Excise. Allen was made the depositary of his intentions, and became his adviser in the mode of

proceeding. Instructed by Sackville, he counselled him not to make a direct application to Lacy, but to draw up a memorial, which would be placed by Allen in the hands of that gentleman. This was never done; on the contrary the application was entrusted to Sackville, and, through his exertions, was successful.

Meanwhile, the applicant was made to believe that for this success, he was indebted not to Sackville, but to Lacy; and in order to prevent the discovery of his error, he was warned not to send to Mr. Lacy any letter of acknowledgment, but to express his gratitude to that gentleman through the medium of a letter to Allen, which he would find an opportunity of showing. This letter was never shown to Lacy, and it was obtained with a different intention; it was to be shown to Mr. Morton, and became the means of confirming in his mind the belief of Lacy's treachery.

Lacy could not obtain from Wilkinson a knowledge of this latter circumstance, nor was he yet aware of the extensive part which Sackville had taken in the organization of this plot. He could only be made acquainted with the agency of Allen; but he doubted not that he was employed by another; and his suspicions wavered between Lord Rodborough and Sackville. The latter was not connected with the borough; but he appeared, even on the showing of Wilkinson, to have some share in the transaction; and Lacy, who now began to take a truer estimate of his character, could easily conceive that jealousy might prompt Sackville to endeavour to injure him in the opinions of the Mortons.

The anger and surprise of the unfortunate Wilkinson, in finding that he had been so completely duped, was much more violently expressed than

the more just indignation of Lacy. Fortunately for Lacy, the former was so much incensed against Allen, for having rendered him so blind a tool, that he gladly consented to lend his assistance in unmasking that person and in undeceiving Mr. Morton. He went home to commence a search for written proofs of Allen's delinquency; and returning to Wichcombe, placed in Lacy's hands one of the anonymous letters which had been attributed to him, and also a letter from Allen, which, though not explanatory, contained sufficient allusions to afford a strong confirmation of the statements of Wilkinson. The anonymous letter bore the mark of the post town, nearest to Lacy Park, and was an excellent imitation of Lacy's hand. In delivering up these letters, Wilkinson gave Lacy full permission to make of them whatever use he pleased; and he also consented to accompany him to town.

Lacy arrived in London on the evening of that day which witnessed the last interview between Sackville and Allen. Having matured his plan of operations, he went, early the following morning, to the house where Allen was residing. He resolved to try the efficacy of a surprise in a private conference with that person. He succeeded in finding Allen alone; and then, without preparing him by any preamble for that which was to follow, placed before him the anonymous letter, and demanded whether he had ever seen it before. Allen knew it well, and could not forbear starting with evident consternation, at the unexpected sight. However, he quickly recovered himself, and began to disclaim all knowledge of the letter: but it was done with awkwardness and hesitation, for he felt that his manner had betrayed him, and that he had evinced a surprise, which could never have

appeared if he had not seen the letter before. Nevertheless, he was proceeding with his denial, when Lacy stopped him.

“Allen,” said he, sternly, “this is useless. I know what has passed, as my possession of this letter may convince you. I have also another written by you, which I obtained from Wilkinson. He has told me every thing, and I have brought him to town, that he may lay the circumstances, if necessary, before my solicitor. Your safest course is to make a full declaration of all you know; and in that case, and that only, your conduct may be overlooked. I am aware that my character has been shamefully attacked; but as I do not yet know that it has been injured in the opinion of any except Mr. Morton, I shall be satisfied with an explanation before him, without having recourse to law; but I shall certainly avail myself of that method of redress, if you refuse to make a full confession. I believe that you have not been acting simply on your own account, but are the instrument of some other person, and I demand to be told, in the first instance, who that person is.”

Allen looked frightened and abashed; but his habitual caution did not desert him. “I hope, Sir,” said he, “you will excuse me, if I don’t answer you immediately. Whether a man is innocent or guilty, it is never prudent to reply off-hand, to these kind of questions. You seem to threaten me with an action. Now, Sir, if a man were to threaten me with an action, even in a case where the right was clearly on my side, I should think myself very impudent, if I were to snap my fingers, and tell him to do his worst. It is not pleasant to get into law whether one wins or loses. I would always take time for consideration; and therefore, Sir, I hope you will not be offended at

my proposing, that when I have heard all you wish to say, I may be allowed to wait upon you in the course of a few hours with my answer."

"To that," replied Lacy, "I shall not agree. Either you will go with me from hence to Mr. Morton's, and explain in his presence the part that you have taken, or I shall consider your silence as a refusal, and proceed with Wilkinson to my solicitor. You may decide at your leisure, but it shall be in my presence. I will have no consultations with confederates."

Lacy then turned away, and taking up a newspaper, left Allen to his own reflections.

That wary person was much embarrassed by Lacy's promptitude and firmness, and found himself unexpectedly brought into a situation of considerable difficulty. He took a rapid mental survey of all that could be adduced in favour of the policy, either of submission or resistance; and found that there was most to be said for the former. It was true, that in that case he must forfeit all chance of extorting money from the fears of Sackville; but a late interview had taught him, that such expectations were but slightly founded. He had already quarrelled with Sackville, and defied his powers; and in exposing him before Lacy and Mr. Morton, he should be gratifying one strong passion of his heart—revenge. He also knew that Sackville's credit was on the wane; and it therefore became advisable to dissolve all connection with a man who would soon cease to be a creditable patron.

In failure of him, it was desirable to attach himself to the service of some more eligible chief. Lacy was a rising man, of good expectations, and esteemed by the world; and if Allen could, by an earnest reparation of the injuries he had commit-

ted, and by apparent zeal for his cause induce Lacy to overlook the numerous attendant stains upon his honesty, and lend him his future countenance and protection, he might hope to derive no slight advantage. These were some of the sentiments that flashed across the mind of Allen, and they disposed him to make his peace with Lacy, and to lay open the iniquities of Sackville.

This important step was immediately taken; and in a short time Lacy became possessed of a complete knowledge of the various arts which had been employed against him, by the man whom he once thought his friend. When Allen had opened his communications, he took care to gain some credit to himself, by making them full and satisfactory, and extending them to every particular in which Lacy was likely to be interested. They therefore embraced not only the machinations of which Lacy seemed the immediate object, but those by which Sackville had effected his engagement with Miss Morton.

Deep was the disgust and indignation of Lacy, as this dark picture of subtle villainy was gradually unfolded. His surprise was less; for it could hardly be said that the truth had burst upon him unexpectedly. The communication did but serve to confirm previous suspicions of foul play, for which he had formerly reproached himself, and which he had tried to dismiss, as illiberal and ungrounded.

But it was now no time to dwell on retrospects. The present emergency called for action. The course of explanation was only begun, and much misunderstanding was still to be removed, between Lacy and Mr. Morton. A letter was immediately sent to the latter, by Lacy, from Allen's abode. It requested, in pressing terms, the favour of an admission to an immediate conference, and with-

out entering into any explanatory details, briefly signified its important object.

A favourable answer was returned; and Lacy, attended by Allen and Wilkinson, repaired to the house of Mr. Morton.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Telle est la force d'un sentiment vrai que, lorsqu'il parle, les interprétations fausses et les convenances factises se taisent.

B. CONSTANT. *Adolphe.*

To detail the progress of the investigation which took place in the presence of Mr. Morton, would be merely to recapitulate circumstances with which our readers are already acquainted. Suffice it to say that, in the course of that conference, the artifices of Sackville were completely unmasked, and the integrity of Lacy established, in a manner that carried entire conviction to the mind of Mr. Morton.

Sackville, meanwhile, remained in ignorance of the event which tended so materially to affect his views; and knew not that, in one hour, the specious fabric of artifice, which he had so long and anxiously reared, had crumbled to dust beneath the touch of truth. Such had been the promptitude of Lacy's proceedings, that the interviews with Allen and with Mr. Morton had both taken place, before Sackville knew that he was returned to London.

On the morning after Sackville's last angry conference with Allen, he was engaged with business, and obliged to forego an intended visit to the Mortons. Having, however, despatched his affairs, he was on the point of bending his course towards the residence of the Mortons, when a packet was put into his hand. It was in Mr. Morton's hand-

writing; and Sackville, on perusing it found, with shame and dismay, that it contained a full and circumstantial statement of many of those parts of his past conduct which he was most desirous of concealing. The communication was also accompanied with copies of those letters and papers, the possession of which he had been so anxious to obtain from Allen. In short, the exposure seemed to have been complete; and the concluding part of the letter showed that the impression made by it upon the sentiments of Mr. Morton, was of the most unfavourable kind. It refused to admit Sackville to a personal conference, until he had sent, in writing, a denial of the truth of the allegations made against him and of the authenticity of the letters and papers which supported them.

“If,” pursued Mr. Morton, “you cannot make this denial, and also establish its correctness; if you cannot remove the opinion, which (though much against my will) I am now bound to entertain, by contrary testimony of as powerful a description; if you cannot impugn the veracity of Allen, it is almost needless for me to say that we can no longer meet on the same terms as formerly, and it will be better for both of us if we never meet again. Your character must be thoroughly cleared from every stain that has been cast upon it by the disclosures which I transmit to you, before I can admit you to an alliance with my family. My daughter, who is informed of all, will, if she does not see you justified, assuredly dissolve her engagement; and were she disposed to act otherwise, I myself should interpose the authority of a parent to save her from a union with dishonour.”

In these few concluding sentences Sackville viewed the extinction of those hopes which he had so long and fondly cherished. He was debarred from the only means by which he could hope to re-

trieve his lost credit. The adventitious aids of manner and address, his persuasive sophistry, and artful insinuation, which could have been employed so effectually in a personal conference, were peremptorily denied him; and he was bidden, in a spirit of stern justice, to combat facts by facts, and rest his defence upon a plain, unvarnished statement of the truth. He meditated long upon the possibility of accomplishing his vindication in the undelusive method that had been prescribed, and, with bitter repining, acknowledged that it was hopeless. He felt that, from that moment, his engagement with Agnes was virtually dissolved. He was defeated: but ever mindful of securing to himself every possible advantage, no sooner had he made this mortifying acknowledgment, than he resolved to turn upon his accusers, and assume the lofty air of injured rectitude and proud defiance.

His answer to Mr. Morton was written in this spirit. "I scorn," said he, "to reply to the mass of calumnies which have been levelled against me—I shall not stoop to expose them. They are too flimsy to have weight in the mind of any one who does not wish to believe them true. Little did I imagine that even an enemy could be found who would so greedily receive them—still less that they would be entitled to immediate credit from the man who has so long professed himself my friend. But it seems that I have been grievously deceived. You say true, Sir, 'we can no longer meet on the same terms as formerly, and it will be better for both of us if we never meet again.' I thank you for speaking so plainly on the subject of my intended marriage with your daughter. Sincerity has come late; but I am glad that it should have appeared at all. You had a wound to inflict, and you have done it with an unshrinking haste, which does credit to your firmness and decision, and which my worst

foe might have reason to admire. You have not scrupled to profess your willingness to discard me, even before you have heard my vindication. You hint that Agnes is no less willing to think ill of me than yourself, and I am not permitted to have any other testimony than your assurance. If true, it is a cruel return for years of love and zealous devotion. The intimation is, without doubt, meant to wound me deeply, and it does. But I will make no parade of what I feel.

“Little as my feelings have been consulted, I am still desirous to spare yours. I will save you, Sir, the painful task of interposing the ‘authority of a parent’ to save your daughter from ‘a union with dishonour.’ I resign the prospect of her hand. My wife she can never be, after that which you have thought proper to declare; but as long as my influence lasts, you must not expect me to consent to her becoming the wife of another. I owe it to myself to express, in this manner, my sense of the treatment I have received. I might have expressed that sense of my wrongs more harshly; I might have allowed the breach of our contract—a written contract, which I have in my possession—to have proceeded entirely from your daughter; and the law would have given me my revenge. But, meanly as you may prize me, I have too much delicacy and honour to drag her name before the public, and render the history of our past engagement a subject for the retailers of scandalous gossip and the purveyors of a licentious press.”

Thus wrote Sackville, after an exposure against which he could not defend himself, which blasted his character, destroyed his hopes, and ought to have covered him with shame and confusion. He had endeavoured, and not unsuccessfully, to assume the proud bearing of conscious virtue. He knew that he was opposed by facts; but his was the effort of desperation. The difficulties of his situation in-

spired him with a kind of reckless energy, and he resolved to swagger himself out of the galling sense of his own debasement.

Experience too often teaches us that outward signs of shame and humiliation are not necessarily attendant upon detected guilt. It is not to be supposed that depraved characters have that sensitive consciousness of their situation which honourably minded persons, judging from their own sentiments, naturally imagine them to feel. Neither is it to be supposed that, even if they did feel much, they would suffer it to become apparent. It is not likely that the dissimulation and sophistry of which a person has long availed himself, should desert him at his utmost need; or that, when reduced to the resource of his own address, that address should not be powerfully exerted in covering his defeat.

It is among the trials of our state, that neither does the course of guilt appear so hateful, nor its punishment so severe and certain, as we conceive it ought to be; and that the acknowledged villain shall walk through the world with as bold a carriage as his honest neighbour, shaking the confidence of the feebly virtuous, and dispensing encouragement to the minor scoundrels that strive to emulate his audacity. But let it not be imagined that where no punishment is seen to fall, it will necessarily follow that none is felt. Let not the probable existence of "that within which passeth show," be utterly forgotten. Let it rather be believed, that the wound is most severe in him who labours most to hide it; and that he is not least a prey to secret shame, who most proudly blazons his contempt of censure.

Sackville's audacious spirit of retaliation was not confined to the letter from which we have given the foregoing extract. On the following morning he called upon Lacy, whom he found alone. He entered with a reserved and lofty air, and met

Lacy's eye with a firmness that induced the latter to believe at first that he was still ignorant of the disclosures that had taken place.

But Sackville's first words undeceived him. Drawing himself up into an attitude of defiance, and fixing his eyes upon Lacy, with a most severe and appalling scrutiny, he sternly demanded,

"Mr. Lacy, do you believe that I have injured you?"

The reply was given in one word—"Yes."

Then followed a pause—a pause of expectation in Lacy, of surprise and embarrassment on the part of Sackville. The latter was quite disconcerted by the unexpected plainness and brevity of Lacy's answer. He had formed for Lacy, in his own mind, a very different reply, to which he had provided a pointed and powerful rejoinder; but that decisive monosyllable had rendered all his tactics useless. Nevertheless, his usual promptitude in resources did not desert him.

"I admire your sincerity, Sir," said he to Lacy, "though I think your opinions might have been somewhat more charitable. I am then to understand that, on the word of a rascally land-surveyor, you are willing to believe that I have acted dishonourably, though you have not yet heard my defence."

"Yes," again replied Lacy; "but I wish to hear that defence, and shall be glad to find reason for changing my opinion."

"And do you think, Sir," retorted Sackville, scornfully, "that I came here with the paltry object of defending myself against the calumnies which a low-born miscreant may choose to utter, and which you, in your charity, may think proper to believe?"

"I cannot tell what is your object," said Lacy, "but if it had been to correct a misrepresentation; I could not have considered it a paltry or unworthy

one. If I am in error, I am sorry for it; and still more that you should wish me to remain so. I may reasonably regret that so little value is put upon my good opinion."

"Doubtless, you may," replied Sackville, with a sneer; "but you need not let that wound your pride. I should not prize the good opinion of any man, were he the best and greatest in the land, if that good opinion could be resigned as easily as yours has been. I repeat, Sir, I do not come here to defend myself; but, I do not choose that you or any man should construe my silence into shame or fear, or suppose that, because I scorn to reply, I am willing to acknowledge the justice of all the slander that has been uttered against me. I can face my accusers, and boldly too, as you can testify; and I leave you to judge, whether that would have been the case, if all were true that is said against me. Mark my words, Mr. Lacy, the time may come when you will repent of having so willingly thought ill of me. I will not boast of what you owe me—let your own conscience tell you that. Meanwhile, pursue your own course. I am no humble suitor for your gratitude—no, nor for your silence. If you wish to trumpet forth the history of your imaginary wrongs, do it. If you wish to extol your own forbearance, while you are reviling me behind my back in every company you enter, do it. If you wish to blacken the character of one to whom you owe more than you ever can repay, in the name of all that is mean, treacherous, and ungrateful, do it. Say your worst—I do not fear it. My reputation stands too firm to be shaken by a word of yours. The mischief will only recoil upon the heads of its agents. Use your tongue freely and boldly—I shall not call you to account, It would do me little credit to be killed by you,

and my principles will not allow me to take a life which I once saved."

The object of this violent and galling speech was not only to assume the proud security of conscious innocence, but to irritate Lacy into some unguarded act or expression, which might give Sackville an advantage over him. But Lacy, though, perhaps, not qualified to contend with Sackville in subtlety, had that firmness of principle, and rectitude of intention, which stood him in better stead than art. He regarded Sackville when he had ended, with a steadiness, before which the eye of the latter momentarily fell.

"Mr. Sackville," he said, "what creditable purpose can this bravado serve? If you wished to insult and give me pain, you have succeeded; but if you wished to goad me into revengeful violence and forgetfulness, you have not succeeded, nor ever shall. I have volunteered no charge against you, and I ask you for no reparation. The injury that was done, has already been repaired without your interposition; and my desire, from that moment, was to forget that you had ever been my enemy. You are safe, Sir, from all attacks of mine, and I shall never, henceforth, breathe a syllable to your disadvantage. I am inclined to believe that you were conscious of your safety, and secretly did me the justice to think that I should not act so mean a part. In either case, it would have been more generous and noble, to have withheld your taunts. You might also have withheld your allusion to a duel, and your attempted reflection on my courage, which I heartily despise, and, as you well know, with reason. It argued little of the magnanimity to which you lay claim, to have boasted reproachfully of the service you once afforded me. You did me a cruel injustice in assuming that I required to be reminded of it. I can never forget it, and I

must always be grateful. You have done much, and you may do more, to lessen that gratitude; but nothing ever ought to extinguish it. You have cruelly sported with my character, and belied me with those whose esteem I had most reason to value. You have embittered many a past hour. You have done that which might have caused me to hate you; but I thank God I do not, nor will I ever injure you, if I can help it."

Sackville seemed moved. A flush of upbraiding shame passed hastily across his features. A severe internal struggle appeared to agitate his mind, and he turned away to conceal its visible indications from the eye of Lacy.

"I am sensible, Sir," said he at length, with a more softened manner, and in a tone of mournful seriousness, "that the term of our intimacy has come to a close. After I have quitted this room, we may never meet again; we shall certainly never speak to each other; but I will not leave you with the impression that I have not the courage to confess my faults. I acknowledge that I *have* injured you."

He then requested a pen and paper, and sat down to write. His letter (for such it seemed) was very short, and occupied him only a few minutes. When he had finished, he sealed it; and having written on the outside, placed it in Lacy's hands. In lieu of direction, were the following words:—"To be opened by Mr. Lacy, only in the presence of Mr. Morton, and not until he has received express permission in writing from me. E. SACKVILLE."

Lacy read these words with surprise, and looked at Sackville, as if to request an explanation.

"I see," said the latter, "that you think my conduct strange, and perhaps suspicious; but it will be satisfactorily explained whenever that pa-

per shall be opened. But before I leave it in your hands, I must require your solemn promise never to open it but in the presence of Mr. Morton, after having received permission from me. You must also promise, that should I at any time require you to destroy this paper, you will instantly burn it unopened."

Lacy promised to fulfil either injunction faithfully.

"I know," added Sackville, "that I am dealing with a man of honour, and that when your word is given, it will be kept. I do not know whether the confidence I now place in you deserves to be considered as any reparation for the pain I may once have caused you. If I were to say so, I should, perhaps, be rating much too highly the value of my own good opinion. At any rate, Sir, I am glad that the last opinion of your character, which you will now hear me utter, should be so favourable. I hope it will prove just. Farewell!"

So saying, he suddenly turned away, and before Lacy was aware of his intentions, and could return that adieu which was to be their last, Sackville had left him.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Beseech you, Sir, be merry; you have cause
(So have we all) of joy; for our escape
Is much beyond our loss!

Tempest.

PREVIOUS to the foregoing interview between Lacy and Sackville, Sackville's letter had been received by Mr. Morton, and Agnes had been told that she was free. The announcement was received with deep and overpowering emotion; and after a vain struggle to control her feelings, she burst into tears. They were tears neither of sorrow nor of joy; they were the overflowings of an oppressed and agitated spirit, which no longer sought to struggle against the weakness of its nature, when the exertion of self-command was no longer necessary, and the time of trial was past.

But joy did succeed to these emotions when their bitterness had subsided, and allowed her to reflect on her present happier situation; and fervently did she thank Heaven for having saved her from that most sure and enduring of human evils—a marriage without affection.

Lacy, at the time of his interview with Sackville, was not informed of all that had passed between him and the Mortons. He knew not that Sackville had renounced all further communication

with that family, and that his engagement with Agnes was dissolved. This interesting fact became known to him only after the lapse of many days, and through the information of a common acquaintance, who had heard it from Lord Malvern. Subsequent reports confirmed the first, and Lacy was soon relieved from all doubt upon the subject.

Believing that Agnes had never felt any affection for Sackville, and was engaged to him against her wishes, Lacy sincerely rejoiced in her deliverance. But he could not feel that his own prospects were materially brightened. He was pledged to Miss Hartley, and though he did not love her, he had too much honour even to meditate the desertion of her for another. Still he reflected that one great barrier was removed, that there was now no insuperable obstacle, and that Agnes might possibly become his, could he resolve to be so cruel and perfidious as to break his faith with Charlotte Hartley. She had now no guarantee but the firmness and rectitude of his resolution, and he vowed that she should not find it wanting.

But Lacy did not confide presumptuously in his own strength of principle, but felt the necessity of employing every method that occupation and absence could afford, to overcome his attachment to Agnes. He knew that her presence must now be doubly dangerous to him, and he formed the painful determination of never seeing her again till he was married to Miss Hartley. He even meditated quitting London, lest he should accidentally meet her in society: but this intention was rendered needless, by an arrangement which was made by the Mortons themselves.

After the quarrel with Sackville, the intended departure of the Mortons to the Continent, which was to have taken place immediately, was postpon-

ed till the middle of summer, and an offer was made them which would enable them to pass the intervening time more pleasantly than in their humble dwelling in London. The Duke of Swansea, whose intended nuptials we announced some time ago, had lately married, and after passing the first half of his honey moon at a villa at Twickenham, had gone with his bride abroad. On this occasion, the Duke, not knowing the intentions of the Mortons to travel, good naturedly offered them the use of his villa, and they, having now changed their plan, gladly closed with the proposal. They accordingly quitted town for Twickenham, and signified their intention of remaining there till they went abroad.

This circumstance, with which Lacy became acquainted, was sufficient to remove his fears of meeting Agnes again in London. But this was a cruel and melancholy cause for satisfaction; and Lacy could not suppress some bitter repinings, even when he felt that he ought to rejoice. He allowed that it was better that they should be far apart; but when he considered that she was soon to go into a foreign land; that seas were to divide them, and that she might probably stay many years, nay, perhaps die abroad, and that he might never see her more; he could not bear the picture that he had formed, and his eyes filled with tears at the melancholy thought.

He resolved (it was a foolish project, as he half allowed, but he could not forego it,) he resolved to discover the day of her departure, and shortly before it came, to see her for the last time. He did not mean to address her: he did not even mean that she should see him. He meant, unperceived, to steal a last look at her whom he loved, to treasure up her image in his memory, and hurry back, and be wretched.

One morning, about a fortnight after Lacy's interview with Sackville, he received a letter, bearing the post-mark of a small town in the north of England, and written in a female hand. Lacy knew nobody in that neighbourhood from which it was sent, nor did he recognize either the seal, the hand, or the initials of the writer. It was a hasty scrawl, the substance of which, when decyphered, proved to be as follows:—

“I hardly know whether you will be surprised or not when you hear of the step I have taken; but I hope you will not have been quite deceived, for I think you must have suspected what my real sentiments were. I assure you it has not been my wish to behave disingenuously. I wanted, several months ago, to have made the communication to you in confidence, but you would not let me, though I cannot help thinking that you almost knew what I was going to say. If that was the case, you can easily excuse me, as I shall not have been the only person to blame. I cannot, however, help feeling that, under all circumstances, you ought to receive the intimation sooner than anybody else, and this is the reason for my now venturing to write to you. I cannot say more at present, for I scarcely know how to address you upon such a subject; and, I assure you, it is very unpleasant for me to write at all, and I should not have done it, if I had not thought it proper.”

Here followed the signature, which consisted solely of the letters C. L.

Lacy was completely puzzled. He could not divine the meaning of this mysterious note, nor could he discover its writer. He judged it to have come from a lady. It had all the neat and elegant characteristics of a female hand, so easily distinguishable from that of a man, and yet so hard to be identified; so small, and faint, and flowing, and, unlike the scrawls of the other sex, still beautiful

when scarcely legible. There were the usual exuberant capitals, the flourishing heads of the *d*'s and the long, curly tails of the *g*'s, *y*'s, *f*'s, and *z*'s; the indistinguishable similarity of all the five vowels, and the common confusion of *n*'s and *m*'s with *u*'s and *w*'s. Lacy was acquainted with two ladies whose initials were C. L., but why either of them should write to him at all, much less so singular a letter, was more than he could comprehend. If it was a hoax, which he partly suspected, he could only say, that it was a very poor one.

At length, however, on his reading the letter over again, an idea suddenly flashed across his mind, which threw a new and singular light upon the circumstance. Doubts and suspicions arose, which he became inexpressibly anxious to satisfy, and he waited, in the most eager suspense, for the arrival of the next day's post. It came, and brought the following letter from his sister.

“MY DEAR HERBERT,

“I have a very unpleasant task to perform. I am to acquaint you with an event which has caused no slight grief and surprise to us all, and at which I am sure none will be more astonished than yourself. Charlotte has left us. She went away on Tuesday without our knowledge, and is now married to Mr. Luscombe. I feel quite bewildered, and at times can hardly believe it true. Considering all circumstances, I own the step she has taken is beyond my comprehension. That she was once attached to you cannot be doubted, nor could I ever perceive that the attachment declined, or that the engagement was irksome to her. But you have probably seen more, and can explain what has happened better than I can. I fear that she at length perceived your indifference to her, and was driven by that painful discovery to her present rash and unfortunate proceeding. If she has been in-

fluenced by pique, I am afraid she feels no attachment to the present object of her choice. I dread to think that such is the case, for it would be a terrible aggravation of the evils of this unfortunate affair.

“I hope you cannot accuse yourself of having led to it, by any change of manner towards poor Charlotte. Though you may be glad of a release, I think you would be sorry to have purchased it at such a price. I trust, however, that she may still be happy. Angry as I must feel with Mr. Luscombe, for his treacherous and deceitful conduct, I cannot but admit that he has some pleasing qualities. He is fortunately not so much Charlotte’s superior in intellect as you would have been; and there will be more of that equality which is essential to conjugal happiness. I fear he has been influenced, chiefly, by mercenary considerations, and has no real love for her: but she is of an easy temper, and not romantic in her notions, and, provided he treats her well, will probably be satisfied with the mere decencies of moderate affection. I will do him the justice to say, that I think his natural obligingness will prevent him from ever being a harsh or unfeeling husband; and as Charlotte’s intellectual wants are not extensive, I trust that good humour in a partner, will almost suffice to make her happy. It is a very different match from such as I could have wished for her, but the evil is now past remedy, and we must try to make the best of it.

“Charles is just returned from his fruitless pursuit. He saw his sister, who said that she had written to you. I wonder at it, but perhaps she thought that a letter would be some compensation for having used you so ill. I would have written sooner, but I did not like to send you any report till I knew the whole truth.

“I went over to Lacy yesterday, and saw my

mother, who is very much afflicted at Charlotte's elopement. What chiefly harasses her now, is the fear of a duel between you and Mr. Luscombe. I hope nothing of the kind is to be apprehended, and so I tell her, but she will not believe me. Pray write soon, and set her mind at ease. This unpleasant affair has obliged us to defer, for a short time, our coming up to town: but I hope you may find us there in the course of a fortnight."

Great was the surprise of Lacy at this unexpected release from his protracted state of thralldom. Serious as the event was, and disposed as he must be to regret the folly of an act which gave such displeasure to his nearest relations, he could scarcely resist a smile at Lady Lacy's fears lest he should call Luscombe severely to account. He even forgot all mortification at the deception which had been practised upon him, in thoughts of the happy prospects which his deliverance opened. He had been a prey to the most gloomy presages, the most bitter regrets, and now all was sunshine. He might truly be said to have earned the happiness of the present moment, by the honourable firmness of his late resolutions. He had not sown the seeds of repentance, by wavering in his plighted faith to Charlotte Hartley, but could look back upon his past intentions with the honest glow of self-approval.

It is a galling thing to be jilted, especially when the jilting is accompanied with the breach of a positive engagement. Lacy knew that he had every possible right to be exceedingly indignant; yet never did he experience the slightest anger, and when he called to mind the ambiguous conversation which he once held with Miss Hartley, and to which she alluded in her letter, he was rather inclined to laugh at the remembrance of their mutual misconception. The knowledge of her intended confession, served in some degree to acquit her, in his opinion, of the

charge of deceit; therefore the weight of his displeasure, had he felt any, must have fallen upon Mr. Luscombe.

But Luscombe was not the sort of person against whom he could entertain a very lofty indignation. He also surmised, and very truly, that this gentleman was not unconscious of his real sentiments with regard to Miss Hartley; and that he knew, that in carrying off that Lady, he should not be robbing Lacy of a treasure, the loss of which he would very deeply resent.

That Miss Hartley should have preferred to Lacy, one so much his inferior in every respect as Luscombe, may at first appear strange; but it is easily explained. It has been already sufficiently shown that she was not qualified to estimate the superiority of Lacy at its proper rate. On the other hand, she was quick enough to discover, in spite of Lacy's uniform kindness and civility of manner, that he did not care for her, nay more, that he despised her. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to love, under circumstances like these: to some minds it would be easier to hate. Indeed, it is not improbable that Miss Hartley might have been partly supported in her system of deceit, by the hope of proving her superiority in artifice, over one who had presumed to undervalue her capacity. She felt that her mind had little in common with Lacy's, whereas between herself and Luscombe, there was a constant congruity of sentiment, much of which was artfully assumed by the latter. She felt humbled before Lacy, but was elevated and flattered by the homage of Luscombe, who was all deference and attention. From the society of the latter, she derived constant pleasure; from that of the former, much occasional entertainment, but always blended with a painful sense of inferiority.

When such was the case, it is not wonderful that she would have preferred the bland, obsequious

Luscombe. Luscombe was the author of the deceitful course which Miss Hartley adopted towards Lacy, and of her eventual elopement. He was not devoid of regard for her, nor was he insensible to her beauty, but his principal object was her fortune. He had little himself, and knew that in the event of an open courtship and proposal, he should be strongly opposed by her relations. Secrecy was therefore his only chance of success: and fortunately for his designs, he found Miss Hartley to be one of those weak, timid characters, who are naturally disposed to prefer dissimulation to openness, and seek to defend themselves by the resources of artifice.

Being an intimate acquaintance of her brother, Luscombe had frequent opportunities of seeing the young lady, and had secured her affections, and exchanged vows even before the period at which this story commences. But he had long to wait, for Miss Hartley would not be of age till the end of the ensuing April, and by previous elopement he should fail in accomplishing his principal object. In the mean time, he contrived to blind her brother, and even the superior discernment of his lady, by affecting not to admire Miss Hartley, and professing himself a confirmed bachelor. With an admirable air of sincerity he concurred with the real wishes of Lady Lacy, and the pretended ones of Mrs. Hartley, that Herbert should be married to Charlotte; and when the engagement was actually announced, nobody spoke of it with greater pleasure both to them and their acquaintance.

This elopement was a severe and just punishment to Mrs. Hartley. Not only were her projects frustrated, but she was defeated with her own weapons, by persons whose talent and address she justly held to be inferior to her own. But in the ignominious warfare of cunning, the victory, as is meet, depends not upon those qualities of which

any one has reason to be proud. The possession of high endowments is rather unfavourable to success. It induces a dangerous confidence, a disposition to bold and open measures, and a disregard of those petty advantages of which meaner craft will not scruple to avail itself. Mrs. Hartley, it is true, was not calculated to feel the lofty security and noble unsuspectingness of her brother; but she was undoubtedly led, by a consciousness of address, to place too great a reliance on her own discrimination, and to pay too little attention to the actions of Charlotte Hartley and Mr. Luscombe, from the very erroneous belief that, let them do what they would, they could never deceive her.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Wooing thee I found thee of more value
Than stamps in gold, or sums in sealed bags,
And 'tis the very riches of thyself
That now I aim at.

Merry Wives of Windsor.

THE time was now past when Lacy would consider it his duty to avoid the society of Agnes. All the serious obstacles which had opposed his love for her were now removed, and he accordingly made an early use of his newly acquired liberty, and called upon the Mortons at their residence at Twickenham. They had heard of Miss Hartley's marriage; and though scarcely any allusion could be made to such a subject, there was at least sufficient to satisfy Lacy that they were informed of his release.

He saw Agnes, and though it was but for a short time, and their conversation was unimportant, there was a conscious timidity in her manner towards him, and a blush on her cheek at the first meeting, from which he drew the happiest auguries. He staid long, and contrived to implicate himself in a commission for Lady Louisa, which would afford him an excellent reason for calling soon again. The second visit secured to Lacy a still greater degree of friendly intimacy with the family, and an invitation to dine with them *en famille* on a following day.

It was then, during the absence of the ladies after dinner, that the name of Sackville was first introduced, and in the course of conversation, Mr. Morton mentioned his office of trustee under the

will of Mrs. Denham, and the power that he thereby possessed of withholding all except ten thousand pounds, of the fortune of Agnes, in case of her marrying before the age of twenty-four without his consent.

“That consent,” added Mr. Morton, “he threatens to withhold; and after all that has passed it is absolutely impossible that we can ask him for it. My daughter, therefore, must not consider herself an heiress till her twenty-fourth year has expired. This is no family secret,” pursued he, “or I should not have mentioned it.”

There was nothing in the tone or expression of Mr. Morton which indicated that his communication had been made with a particular object. But Lacy could easily understand that Mr. Morton contemplated the possibility of a renewal of his addresses to Agnes, and had very honourably let fall, as if in advertently, a piece of information which would prevent Lacy from being deceived, and if his views were merely mercenary, would put a stop to his pursuit. Lacy also thought that Mr. Morton’s declaration that the above fact was not a secret, might be received by him as a permission to communicate it to his father. Accordingly, in his next letter to Sir William, he stated that he still preserved his attachment to Miss Morton, and that if no objection was made by his own family, he had reason to think that he had no further obstacle to apprehend. He confessed that it would be presumptuous to make sure of the Lady’s consent before he had offered his proposal, but he had seen enough to convince him that if there were difficulties, they were not insurmountable. He then mentioned the circumstances stated by Mr. Morton, and expressed some pleasure at the thought that Agnes should have no reason to believe that she was sought on account of any other motive than that of affection.

Lacy soon received an answer from his father, of which the following is a part.

“Do not expect me to be as liberally-minded as yourself. I shall not like Miss Morton a bit the better for having only ten thousand pounds instead of eighty thousand. But you need not let this alarm you. I shall like her well enough to allow her to be your wife—or rather, I like you well enough to allow you to be happy in your own way. But as the question is one of money, it will be better for me to tell you the state of my circumstances, and the allowance that I can make you, and then you will be able to judge for yourself.”

After some details, which it is needless to transcribe, the letter proceeded thus:

“You know what you have to expect, and may shape your course accordingly. With the addition of ten thousand pounds to your allowance you may be comfortable—with eighty thousand, affluent. Weigh these circumstances well. Fix the amount of what you conceive to be a competency. Measure accurately your own disposition to contentment, and, if possible, that of your intended bride. Dismiss, for a moment, your visions of love, and in a cool, cold, worldly vein of prudence, think how far wealth is essential to your happiness. This being done, you may be once more as romantic as you please. Consider too, that, by your own showing, if you choose to wait four years, you may marry Miss Morton without incurring the loss of the seventy thousand pounds. Reflect, then, for a moment, on the amazing prodigality of your love. Think that if you marry Miss Morton immediately, you and that lady will be expending, in attachment, the monstrous sum of seventeen thousand, five hundred pounds per annum, which is much more than I humbly conceive any other pair of affections to be fairly worth. You will, perhaps, decide that your own are worth more, and I shall not

quarrel with you, for nobody can be competent to settle that point but yourselves.

"I again repeat—be cautious and considerate. Pursue a wise and even mean between the romantic disregard of money, and the illiberal pursuit of it; and know your own mind so thoroughly, that you may leave nothing to be discovered, when it is too late to retract. If you propose to Miss Morton, acquaint her father immediately with the extent of your promised allowance. Tell him, too, that I am informed of the circumstances you mention, and let him not suppose, that I am desirous of your marrying for fortune."

After this liberal and favourable reply, it only remained for Lacy to urge his suit, and to obtain the consent of Agnes herself. But though he could not feel very diffident of success, he was nevertheless aware that delicacy required some caution and delay, and a due consideration of the circumstances, in which each of them were lately placed. However well he might know the truth, it would be too much for him to assume that Agnes had no affection for Sackville; and that so soon after a quarrel with one, whom she had almost engaged to love and honour, she was willing to outrage her former vows, by the acceptance of another person.

Almost similar was his own situation with reference to Miss Hartley, and there was this additional difficulty, that Agnes was not acquainted with the circumstances which had led to that engagement, and might, therefore, suppose that it proceeded either from attachment on the part of Lacy, or what was worse, from mercenary motives. Either impression was unfavourable to his success, and it was difficult to conceive that Agnes should not entertain one of the two.

Such were the considerations which prompted Lacy, in spite of the impatient ardour of his love, to see Agnes frequently, before he risked his hopes

in a proposal. Without employing a single expression indicative of attachment, he could easily cause her to perceive the enchaining pleasure which her society gave him, and he talked to her with an interest which could betoken nothing less than an approaching declaration: but he never saw her alone, and he could not introduce that subject which was nearest to his heart, without such an opportunity.

At length, however, the opportunity arrived. He found her one morning alone in the shrubbery which encircled the villa, and inclined, in a gentle slope, towards the river. There was a cheerful beauty in the scene, which animated, and enlivened, and tended to dispel that feeling of reserve, which rendered an allusion to past events, not only difficult but painful. Lacy was enabled to mention in her presence, for the first time, the name of Miss Hartley, and failed not to avail himself of the introduction of such a subject, to tell her the origin and motives of his engagement, and the delusion in which he had remained.

Agnes heard him in silence, not unaccompanied with agitation, for she judged that a communication of so interesting a nature, could not be made without an object. Lacy observed every passing expression of her countenance, and could almost collect the import of her meditations.

"I hope," said he, "you will not be surprised or displeased at my venturing to tell you so much of the history of my own feelings. I think you must have observed that I entertain no common anxiety for your good opinion. The event which has happened, would, under any other circumstances, have been very painful to me; but you see that it is not, and I am sure you would have reason to think me a very unfeeling, cold-hearted person, if you did not know what my sentiments had been, and what it was that led to my engagement.

Won't you allow that it would have been so—that but for this explanation, you would have thought me cold-hearted and fickle!”

“Perhaps I should,” replied Agnes, timidly, and blushing as she spoke.

“And that,” pursued Lacy, “is the last character I should wish you to give me: but perhaps I have not cleared myself sufficiently, and you think me so still?”

“I am almost afraid to answer you,” said Agnes, “for I do not feel privileged to judge; but since you desire it, I will venture to say, that I think you can hardly be accused of fickleness, since it appears, by your account, that you have always felt the same.”

The countenance of Lacy brightened with pleasure at these words, and Agnes discovered, with confusion, that her expressions admitted of another application besides that which she intended. She was hastily attempting to qualify their meaning, when Lacy interposed.

“Do not,” said he, “do not endeavour to unsay what is so true, and so delightful. I have indeed, always felt the same, since those happy days which I passed in your society at Huntley. Often have I been on the point of avowing it, and never has it been relinquished, even when your own engagement put a stop to every hope. Months then passed without my seeing you, and I became pledged to another, and I hoped, for it became a duty, that I had conquered my former feelings; but I saw you again, and all my admiration and attachment was revived as strongly as before—I tried to forget you—but I could not, and now I know that I never can.

He had taken her hand, and she made no effort to withdraw it. Her face was turned away, and concealed by the other hand, and Lacy was not allowed to discover the emotion with which his de-

claration was received, but by the beautiful colour which suffused her neck. She made no reply; but so delightful to Lacy was her silence, that he scarcely wished even for the sound of that sweet voice which to his ear was ever music. He knew that if his suit had seemed presumptuous, or been felt to be unwelcome, she would have spoken to repress him; but she had not, and he was at liberty to indulge in the delightful consciousness of being accepted, he could almost add, of being loved in return.

So encouraged, he ventured in still plainer terms to pour forth all the emotions of his heart, and to solicit that one rich reward which was to crown his happiness. He ceased, and heard, with inexpressible pleasure, the soft, low, tremulous accents of assent. He received the confession, timid, but sincere and full, of corresponding attachment, and fervently kissed the hand that was henceforth to be ever his.

Lacy lost no time in informing Mr. Morton of the happy result of his interview with Agnes; and had the pleasure of receiving that gentleman's sanction and approval, and an assurance of the satisfaction with which he should regard him as a son-in-law. He then, in obedience to his father's wishes, proceeded candidly to lay before Mr. Morton the extent of his expectations, his own and his father's knowledge of the circumstance which would deprive Agnes of the greater part of her fortune, and Sir William Lacy's liberal avowal, that such a loss on the part of his son's intended bride, would by no means militate against his consent. Mr. Morton suitably acknowledged the liberality of these sentiments, and expressed his wish that the friendship between the families, so lately established, and then so soon dismissed, might henceforth never be disturbed.

The time for the marriage was now to be fixed; and here Mr. Morton pleaded for delay. He re-

mind Lacy of the engagement from which Agnes had so lately been freed, and suggested the propriety of waiting at least beyond the time at which she was to have been united to Sackville; and to this suggestion Lacy's delicacy forbade him to offer any opposition. Mr. Morton also hinted at the prudence of waiting till such a time as would secure to Agnes the benefit of her whole fortune; but as this term of probation would amount to four years, he did not strongly press its adoption. Neither, if he had, would Lacy willingly have consented. He had obtained the sentiments of Agnes, and knew that she would not seriously regret the loss of so great a portion of her fortune, but be satisfied and happy in sharing with him diminished wealth, and gratified by so strong a practical assurance of being sought on account of endowments more intrinsic than those of fortune.

Of this assurance, more strong than words could convey, he vowed that nothing should deprive her. It was also a consolatory reflection to both of them, that the wealth of which they should be thus deprived would not be lost to the family, or diverted to unworthy objects; but was to be divided among the brothers and sisters of Agnes: and this consideration confirmed them still more in their resolution not to allow the diminution of fortune to be any impediment to their union.

Immediate information of the intended nuptials of Lacy and Agnes was sent to Mr. Hawksworth, with a request of his sanction, as guardian and trustee. It was also requested, that since Mr. Morton had suspended all communication with Sackville, Mr. Hawksworth would forward these tidings to him, and at the same time, desire to be informed whether it was Sackville's final determination to give or to withhold his consent. It was hoped that Mr. Hawksworth would make this demand plainly, and without urgency or any appearance of

entreating a favour for the Mortons, and that he would add, that the refusal of Sackville's consent would make no change in the intentions of the other parties, or delay the marriage for a single day.

This was accordingly done. The answer that Mr. Hawksworth received from Sackville was brief and unsatisfactory: without saying that his consent should be either given or withheld, it expressed wonder at having been applied to, and a request that he might not be addressed again upon such a subject. It was equivalent to a refusal; and Agnes was consequently compelled to look forward with resignation to the threatened forfeiture.

The Mortons were now preparing for their intended departure to the Continent. The approaching marriage of Agnes made no change in their plans. Lacy meant to follow them, and the marriage was to take place abroad, about the beginning of autumn.

One day, about a week before the time fixed for their journey, Lacy received a letter from Sackville. It contained merely these words: "I give you my permission to open, in the presence of Mr. Morton, the letter which I deposited in your hands at our last meeting."

Lacy immediately availed himself of this interesting and at present inexplicable permission. He took the unopened letter to Mr. Morton, and after relating some of the attendant circumstances, broke the seal in his presence.

Well was he rewarded for the strictness with which he had observed the conditions of Sackville. In the mysterious paper he read, with surprise, the following words: "If the engagement of marriage, now subsisting between Mr. Lacy and Miss Hartley, should at any future time be dissolved, and Mr. Lacy should make an offer of marriage to Miss Morton, and be accepted by that lady, I, Edward

Sackville, guardian and trustee of Miss Morton, do freely consent that such marriage may be solemnized, and that Miss Morton shall be exempted from the forfeiture to be incurred, in case of my non-approval, under the will of the late Mrs. Denham."

Below were a few lines addressed to Lacy, and which ran as follows: "You will perhaps be surprised at my manner of conveying this consent; you shall therefore know my reasons. I cannot, with propriety, openly advert to that event, which may never happen, and which, at this present time, circumstances seem imperatively to forbid. But I am nevertheless desirous to show you, that this consent, the greatest sacrifice of my own feelings that I have ever yet had the power to make, is not wrung from me by entreaty, nor is the tardy result of long consideration; that it is given in the only manner truly worthy of such a boon, is given promptly and unasked. I require only one favour in return; that neither you nor any one whom this, my consent, can in any degree concern, will ever write to me on the subject. I do not know whether I have merited thanks; but if I have, I do not want them."

It is needless to expatiate upon the surprise and pleasure which this singular disclosure caused. The pleasure was lessened only by Sackville's refusal to accept of thanks, and his uncompromising tone of sullen pride, which seemed to spurn at the bare thought of reconciliation. He was unworthy of being again received on terms of friendship: but true generosity is slow to scan the errors of one who has conferred a benefit, and finds enmity painful even towards those whom it cannot esteem.

Immediately after the foregoing discovery, Lacy wrote to his father, and enclosed the singular letter that conveyed it. He received from Sir William Lacy the following, soon afterwards, in reply:—

“MY DEAR HERBERT,

“I thank you for sending me, so speedily, tidings which you knew would give me pleasure. You have proved your disinterestedness to the heart's content of all by whom you are known and esteemed, as you deserve, and you may now take the gifts of fortune without a blush. The event has surprised me as little as any thing would that was equally unforeseen. Sackville's consent was not to be expected; but the strange mysterious manner in which it was given, seems to me perfectly natural and characteristic. Your scoundrel generally prefers a theatrical mode of doing good. The plain, simple, easy course pursued by common-place, honest people, is much too humble for the man, who, as he seldom does a praiseworthy action, likes, *when* he does, to do it splendidly. I admire his proud refusal to accept your thanks—thanks for an act of common justice! He knows that they are not due.

“Do not think me ungrateful for speaking so severely of the man who saved your life. Such benefits would become injuries if they prevented us from estimating correctly the conduct and character of those who conferred them. The man who saves a thousand lives obtains no privilege to play the villain. Establish the principle of making good deeds excuse bad ones, and morality becomes little more than a system of truck and barter. No one would have much more to do than just to keep his virtue at par, and saints and sinners might respectively exchange their moral scrip, like the bulls and bears of the stock exchange.

“Make a balance-sheet of good deeds, available in a court of justice, and contemplate the consequences. The Humane Society, on the credit of their resuscitations, might emulate with impunity, the *noyades* of the Loire; and the fireman, who had saved a house, could never be hanged for burning one.

“In the case of yourself and Sackville, I conceive the balance to have been fully adjusted. He saved your life before you were his rival: but since he has seen you in that character he has shown almost an equal disposition to take it. The return you owed him I conceive to have been paid. You refused to contest his claims and you have long persisted in thinking better of him than he deserved.

“Let me now turn to a more pleasing subject, the contemplation of your happy prospects. You are about to reap the reward of tried affection, and honourable self-denial, and to unite yourself to one who has proved that she is capable of something more than to flutter in the sunshine of prosperity: one who, though she can adorn society and enjoy its pleasures, has had the courage voluntarily to resign them: one who, through evil report and good report, if she dared not say she loved, at any rate esteemed you, and in the constancy of whose affection you may now repose the firmest confidence.

“You will soon become a husband, and your actions will then be invested with a responsibility which they had not before. On this account, though I confess myself feebly qualified for the office of a Mentor, yet, in my capacity of parent, let me give you my sentiments and advice. You will be placed above the necessity of a profession; but let not this circumstance render you inactive. Continue in parliament, and attend strictly to its honourable and important duties. Cultivate society—cultivate business. I do not ask you to make yourself a slave to either, or to indulge in visions of ambition. I merely point out a course which I consider to be most conducive to your respectability and happiness.

“The life of truest happiness is a life of occupation. I have acquired some right to say so, by having experienced the fallacy of its reverse. I do not mean that I have been unhappy. Were I to say

so, I should be very ungrateful for numerous blessings. I have had a large share of all that is held to constitute the materials of happiness; and none perhaps can have passed through life with fewer crosses. But it is on this account I speak. It is in reviewing my advantages that I am made sensible that I have not been so happy as I ought to have been; and loaded as I am with benefits, I can estimate with greater accuracy the little that was wanting to complete the sum of my felicity.

“I know that I wanted occupation, and an object. I had neither a prospect to interest me, nor a gratifying retrospect: all was centred in the present. I set out with the advantages of good family, respectable station, ample fortune, and, I will add, no mean abilities. The three former I retain, but what use have I made of the latter? None,—I grieve to say it—none. Indolence and fastidiousness have prevented me. Cursed with a sensitive delicacy, and a hatred of exertion, I always quickly discovered something coarse, mean, or revolting in every thing that I had a disinclination to do. The paths to Parliament were miry; office, a state of corruption; all business brings one into contact with rogues; and even the exertions which society demands may be reprobated as subserviency and cringing.

“I cared for nothing, and would do nothing. I was and would be independent—and independence has a flattering sound. It is the noblest, safest plea that was ever made for absence of exertion, and deserves to be engraved on the most towering pinnacle of the castle of indolence. I would not press, and labour, and elbow, and truckle: I would look with calm superiority on the distant turmoil, and enjoy the charms of literary leisure. Literary leisure! Choice and beautiful phrase! Its very alliteration is sweet and seductive. But call it by its true name, literary idleness, and how much of

its fancied dignity is lost! Yet such was mine; and I can remember to have regarded exertion in that walk as a degrading drudgery. It is easy to wrap one's self up in fancied importance, and say, 'my mind to me a kingdom is.' Yes, such a king I was, but it was a '*Roy faineant*,' a sort of rural Sardanapalus in my petty territory.

"Believe me when I say, that I now look back with pain on all that I have neglected to do. I have promoted no great or useful object—have connected my name with no interesting event—have written nothing—have spoken nothing—have impressed on no one the belief that I have those talents which I am really conscious of possessing. I write this, not in mortified pride, but in humble regret; not with the hope of a complimentary refutation, but with the worthier hope of affording a useful warning to you.

"Having spoken so freely of myself, I may say a little about your future father-in-law, and bid you draw other warnings from him. Morton and myself have been two opposites, between whose different lines of conduct I counsel you to pursue a middle course. I have sacrificed too little for society: he has sacrificed too much. Though I am sorry for his misfortunes, I have some consolation in thinking that the consequences of his extreme have been by far the most serious. But, on the other hand, I am bound to consider that the misemployed advantages were much greater on my side. We had both of us sufficient fortune; but he is of low extraction, and I of ancient descent. In me, perhaps, the consciousness of birth has encouraged an indolent security; in him the want of it has led to the ruinous substitute of lavish ostentation.

"I may probably, be inclined to overrate the consequences of birth and station; but they have, at least, this advantage, that they are the pledges of

honourable conduct, and afford to pride a less sordid aliment than money. Wealth, if viewed as the chief source and ground-work of distinction, must infallibly narrow the mind of its possessor. The purse-proud man is generally allowed to be the least endurable of coxcombs. He is content with none but *conspicuous* points of superiority, and will often secretly descend to meanness, from which an ancient lineage would have saved him. I conceive Morton to be naturally a generous, honourable, high-minded man. Some points of his conduct have evinced it. But the want of high descent to serve as a *fulcrum* to his ambition of fashionable distinction—his restless sense of insecurity—his feverish struggle for an eminence which he was to gain, partly by manœuvring and cringing, partly by means of a lavish expenditure—all this has debased an honourable mind, and led him through a long train of secret humiliation to one that was signal and decisive.

“I once did him less than justice; for, I will own, that I felt a secret jealousy of his success, which jealousy has since been extinguished by his fall. It shocked my aristocratical prejudices to perceive that a man, with less ostensible pretensions, was more courted than myself; and those prejudices were fostered by seclusion. But I have learned to shake off some portion of my former exclusiveness, and to applaud the liberal spirit of these times, which presents no insurmountable barrier to any species of ambition.

“Let me now congratulate you, my dear Herbert, on having escaped unhurt from the treachery and artifice by which you have been assailed. Let not your trials tend to give you a worse opinion of human nature; let them not weaken your honourable confidence and freedom from suspicion. You have pursued a straight and manly course, and it has led you to your safety. While knaves are run-

ning each other; by the vile acts which helped to raise them, the honest object of their mutual attack walks through unhurt and unsuspecting. But were it otherwise, were it necessary to repel the creatures with their own weapons, rather, I will say, than have recourse to the dirty task of countermining, it were better to be libelled and deceived, and be able to exclaim, like another Francis, 'All is lost except our honour.'

"I will say no more, for I seem to have given you too long a lecture, when I consider how little you need it.

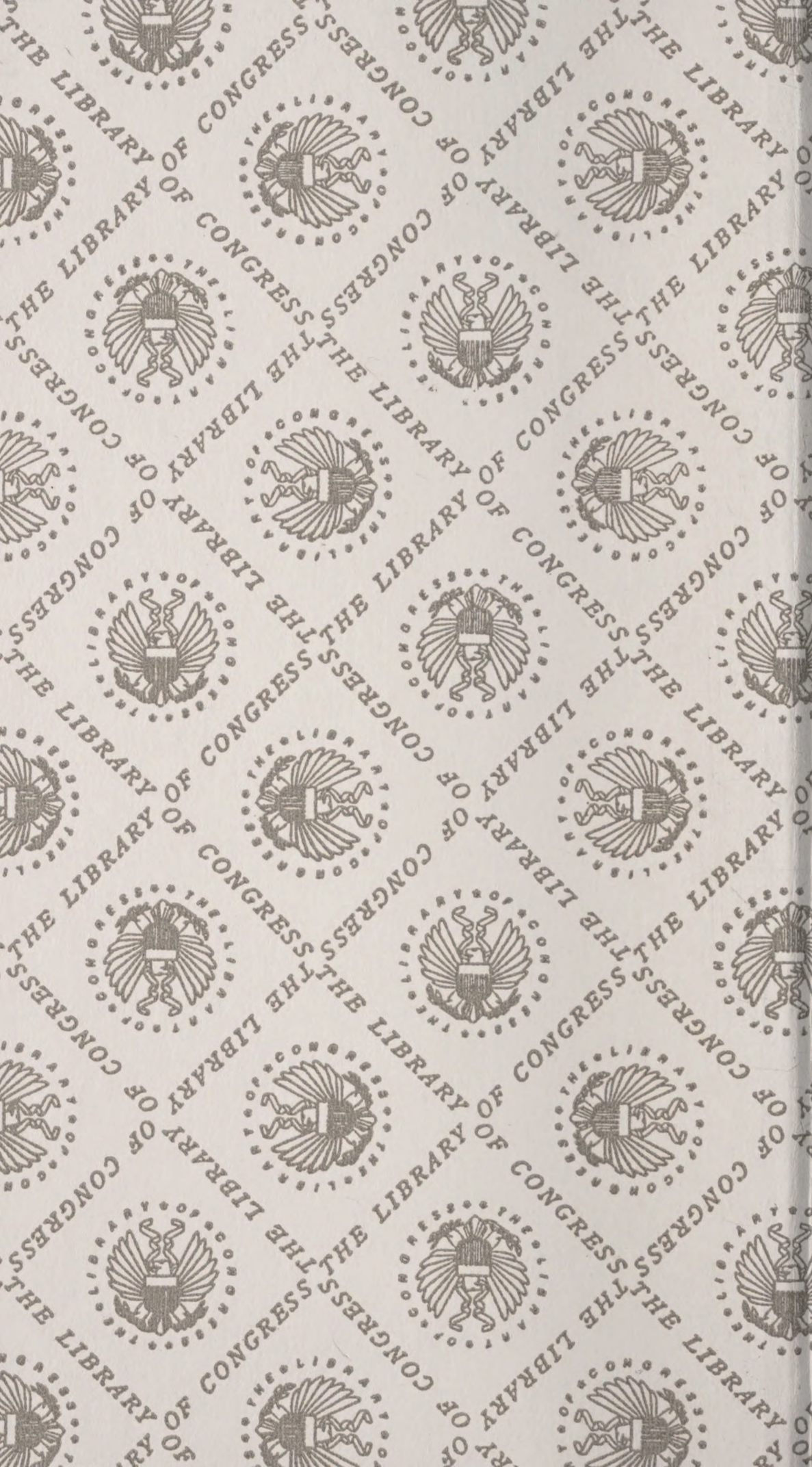
"And now, my dear Herbert, farewell, and with every heartfelt wish for the happiness of yourself, and your intended bride,

"Believe me, ever your most affectionate father,

"W. LACY."

THE END.





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